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MINISTER AT NIGG.

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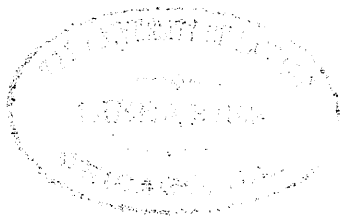
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V. 2.



C O N T E N T S

O F T H E

S E C O N D V O L U M E.

S E R M O N X I.

P S A L M xxiv. 3, 4, 5.

*Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
and who shall stand in his holy place? He
that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;
who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity,
nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the
blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from
the God of his salvation.* Page 1.

S E R M O N X I I.

L U K E xv. 11—24.

*And he said, A certain man had two sons:
and the younger of them said to his father,
Father, give me the portion of goods that*

C O N T E N T S.

falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, &c. P. 37.

S E R M O N XIII.

M A T T H E W xi. 29.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. P. 65.

S E R M O N XIV.

P S A L M iv. 4. last part of the verse.

Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. P. 89.

S E R M O N XV.

L U K E vii. 36——48.

And one of the pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

C O N T E N T S.

And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, &c. P. 113.

S E R M O N XVI.

M A T T H E W xxvi. 36—44.

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, &c. P. 137.

S E R M O N XVII.

J O H N xix. 30.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. P. 171.

S E R M O N XVIII.

I S A I A H liii. 3.

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. P. 195.

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N XIX.

I C O R I N T H I A N S xi. 26.

*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink
this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death
till he come.*

P. 218.

S E R M O N XX.

A C T S xx. 35.

*And to remember the words of the Lord Jesus,
how he said, It is more blessed to give than
to receive.*

P. 246.

S E R M O N XI.

P S A L M XXIV. 3, 4, 5.

*Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
and who shall stand in his holy place? He
that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;
who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity,
nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive
the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness
from the God of his salvation.*

IT is commonly supposed, and it appears extremely propable, that this twenty-fourth psalm was composed by David, in order to be sung by himself, the priests, the Levites, and the people of Israel, when the ark was removed from the house of Obededom to mount Zion^a. That the procession upon this occasion might be the more striking and solemn, it was accompanied with a variety of musical instruments, such as psalteries, harps, timbrels, cymbals, cor-

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^a 2 Samuel vi.

nets, and trumpets. These were played upon in concert with the fingers, whom Cheneniah the master of the song had previously instructed in their several parts.

The sixty-eighth psalm was composed at the same time, the recital of which, together with the musick adapted to it, probably continued till the procession came near to mount Zion, when this twenty-fourth psalm was begun.

While the two first verses were rehearsing, they approached the foot of the hill. Then the king, who had laid aside his royal robes, and assumed the dress of a Levite, advancing, we may suppose, a few steps before the rest, with a voice equally musical and distinct, asked, in the hearing of the whole assembly, *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place?* The answer was returned by the first chorus, in these expressive words, *He that hath clean hands and a pure heart;* and with equal spirit continued by the se-

cond; *who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.* After this the king; the priests, and the Levites, transported with joy, lifting up all at once their voices in concert with the musical instruments, might sing the following verse; *He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*

How grand this procession must have been, and how elevating the musick with which it was attended, I leave every one to imagine; and I shall only observe that, in this instance, we find musick under the care of one who was so perfect a master of it, employing its irresistible power to excite all those sublime and devout emotions, which tend to raise and purify the minds of men. That we may more fully enter into the spirit of that part of the psalm which is to be the foundation of our present discourse, the following observations may be useful.

In a variety of passages of the old testament we discover the respect and awe which filled the minds of the sacred writers, and of the Jews in general, when they mentioned the hill of Zion. Upon this mountain the ark of God, who dwelt between the cherubim, the authentick symbol, and sure pledge of the divine presence, was now to be deposited, and here it remained for a considerable time. For this reason it was called *the hill of God, the holy hill, the mount which the Lord had chosen, where he was to dwell, because he had desired it*^b. The house of their king was also built upon the same ground; the most stately towers were erected upon it, and it was defended by the strongest fortifications. Thus at once the seat of beauty, and of strength, the habitation of divine power, and the mansion of earthly majesty, it became peculiarly venerable; and the very name of Zion naturally excited the fervours of religion and the zeal of patriotism. These sensations, awakened at this time by the novelty and solemnity of the procession, and

^b Psalm cxxxii.

enlivened by the presence and participation of their sovereign, must have risen to a degree of enthusiasm, which, when well placed and happily directed, conveys such rapture, I had almost said such innocent, tumultuous joy, that the man who hath never felt it may be justly considered as an object of pity. When therefore the inspired monarch spoke and said, *Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?* every word must have roused attention, and every look communicated reverence.

The general practice of those who live in warmer climates, the whole system of Jewish manners, the particular ablutions and purifications prescribed to that people, the distinction of their meats into clean and unclean, gave a natural tendency to express whatever was perfect in its kind, by the metaphors of cleanness and purity; and though in every language these phrases, *cleanness of hands* and *purity of heart*, are sufficiently intelligible for denoting a gene-

ral rectitude of conduct, and honesty of intention, yet in the Hebrew language they had a peculiar degree of force and vivacity. By reminding the assembly of those ceremonies and distinctions which were so expressly pointed out by their law, and so religiously observed by their nation, they conveyed the ideas now intended, with more than ordinary advantage. *We* acknowledge that the expressions are proper; *a Jew* felt that they were nervous. When the first chorus replied to the king, *He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart*, not an honest and a worthy man present, but must have rejoiced in the secret gratulations of his own heart; and not a thief, a robber, a cheat, or a hypocrite, but must have perceived his joints begin to tremble, and his heart to fail him as he proceeded.

As the first chorus gave the general character of a good man, the second seems to have warned against those particular vices to which the Jews long discovered a most astonishing propensity, and from which

the Almighty used every method to guard them.

In the language of scripture the false gods which the nations worship are frequently called vanities; the worship of them is frequently stiled *following after vanity*; and putting confidence in them is termed *trusting in vanity*. As the Jews were ever ready to join in the idolatry of their heathen neighbours, to impress on their minds a sense of that crime, and to excite a resolution against it, was extremely suitable to the design of their present assembly. The superstitious rites of the Jebusites, their sacrifices to their idols, had perhaps been performed in the very spot where the ark of God was to be placed. It was unavoidable to remember their abominations: it would have been improper not to have pointed out, in this instance, the difference which ought to subsist between the descendants of Shem, and those of Canaan. The man that boweth his knee to an idol is not worthy to call upon the name of the Lord. The Is-

raelite was only to lift up his soul unto God.

In the days of primitive simplicity, before avarice, vicious refinements, and deceitful reasonings had corrupted the hearts of men, an oath was accounted the most sacred and inviolable of all obligations. An appeal to the Most High was reckoned so awful and solemn, that the rocks, the mountains, or the heavenly bodies, were sufficient vouchers of its authenticity, and no man was called as a witness to engagements which scarce any man thought of infringing. The piles of stones so often erected in Judea, the trees with which the country abounded, gave testimony to the piety and fidelity of its inhabitants. In these circumstances, the breach of an oath must be generally looked upon with particular abhorrence; and therefore as them that *swore to his own hurt, and changed not*, was among them a character of the first consideration, it was a necessary consequence, that the deceitful swearer should

be an object of the greatest detestation. Perhaps too, just before this period, David may have made the people enter into one of those covenants, so common among the Jews, by which they bound themselves in the most solemn manner to adhere to the worship of the true God. On this supposition, there is a singular propriety in the words added by the second chorus immediately after those pronounced by the first; *Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.*

Thus enlivened by the presence of a splendid assembly, soothed and animated by the chorus of sacred musick attending the ark of God, who was distinguished among them by the title of *the Lord of Hosts*, ready to enter a city which had long been possessed by their foes, in the view of a sovereign who was the father of his people, every eye would sparkle with joy, every heart aspire to perfection, and every voice be ambitious to join in the general choir. Struck with the character of the righteous

man, every one would be interested in his favour, and every one would offer up a prayer for his prosperity. In this situation, the words which David had taught his attendants must entirely correspond to their own feelings; and with one heart, and one voice they would pronounce, *He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.* The voice of the Omnipotent seemed to re-echo in every ear, *Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out*^c. Those who had more enlarged, and elevated views, looked for still nobler blessings, and trusted that the period of their perfect joy was to begin, when that which so fully satisfied others was terminated.

^c Deut. xxviii. 3, 4, 5, 6.

These observations may assist us not only to apprehend the meaning, but to enter into the spirit of the passage now under consideration. Its application to the intention of our present meeting is so obvious, that it scarcely needs to be pointed out. The character which was requisite in order to make a proper approach to God under the law, is surely not less requisite in order to make a proper approach to him under the gospel. If the everlasting God was ready to bestow blessings on the righteous posterity of Abraham, he will not be less ready to bestow them on the sincere disciples of Christ.

In discoursing therefore from this portion of scripture, I propose, in a dependance on divine grace, to consider the character which is necessary in order to fit us for waiting on God in his ordinances; and to conclude with some reflections.

First, I propose to consider the character which is necessary in order to fit us for

waiting on God in his ordinances. It is thus described in the words of the text; *He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.*

In every character which would gain the approbation of thinking men, much more in that which would find acceptance with the all-wise God, an inoffensive behaviour is the least thing required. The rapacious wretch, whose house is filled with the gains of oppression, with the goods of the widow and fatherless, or the provision which the poor man had laid up for his subsistence; the unrelenting miser, and the secret defrauder, may assume the appearance of religion, and practise some of its duties; but the voice of reason loudly reclaims against their vain pretensions. By fallacious reasonings, foolish distinctions, and a violent zeal, they may impose upon themselves. The deceitfulness of sin may partly blind them; but their characters cannot so much as bear the inspection of men like them-

selves. How then can they stand before the judgment of God? Listen to the first dictates of nature, to the awful voice within you, which, when permitted, never fails to speak the truth; attend to the plainest precepts of the gospel, and be persuaded that without integrity of life, and decency of conduct, all pretensions to religion are perfectly frivolous. Is this truth so manifest, that it needs not be insisted on? Common sense says it is: but the practice of men seems often to assert the contrary. Did the Pharisees blush, when they joined in the exercises of religion, though they robbed widows houses, and practised all manner of injustice? Do not multitudes at this day, who dare not openly avow it, whisper it to themselves as a ground for their security in sin, that the performance of some positive duties will serve as an atonement for the neglect of many moral ones? But let heaven and earth bear witness, that he who is an enemy to man, cannot be acceptable to God. This then is the first branch of the character we are now

inquiring into, a freedom from all open and secret injustice, from every enormity, and indecency in outward conduct.

But the utmost circumspection with regard to the external behaviour is far from being sufficient to render us acceptable worshippers to God. Man sees only the actions; he can discover no more of the disposition than these lay open. It is the prerogative of God to *search the heart*, and to *try the reins*. The secret motives which actuate the soul are perfectly known to him who formed it; and unless they are upright, in vain do we look for his acceptance. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*^d. They alone are approved by him, and they only are capable of enjoying him. If you present a book to an illiterate person, fairly printed, and elegantly bound, he estimates its value from its outward appearance; but a wise man looks into its contents, considers these, and pronounces accordingly. The heart

^d Matth. v. 8.

is a book which God alone is able perfectly to read, and he pronounces with unerring judgment and impartiality. *As the flag that groweth up without water, whilst it is yet in its greenness, withereth before any other herb, so the hypocrite's hope shall perish. His hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall be as the spider's web*^e.

Ye are called in Christ Jesus to be *the temples of the Holy Ghost*^f. The request of your Saviour is, *My son, give me thy heart*. And if it is possessed by the riches of this world, corrupted by its pleasures, or engrossed by its vanities, will you presume to present it as a suitable oblation to God? How pious, how benevolent, how pure ought his intentions to be, who deliberately subjects himself to the inspection of that eye, which is more quick and penetrating than the lightning of heaven! Is the seat of corruption a fit habitation for the Spirit of God? Is the heart which is the slave of

^e Job xiii. 11, 12, 13, 14. ^f 1 Cor. vi. 19.

a harlot, a proper offering for the Son of God? Will he who calls himself in scripture the *jealous God*, endure any rival in your affections? You never had an inclination to bow before an image; to offer sacrifice to Baal, or to worship any of the gods of the heathens, never entered into your thoughts. Can you be said then never to have *lifted up your soul unto vanity*? Alas! the attention which is commonly paid to gold and silver, the sacrifices of truth and honesty, virtue and humanity, which are made to attain them, shew sufficiently in what veneration they are held by their votaries. Are they not properly the idols before which the covetous bow? Have malice or revenge, or other irregular passions, ever ruled over you, and subjected you to their sway? If they have, remember the voice of truth hath spoken it, *Ye are his servants whomsoever ye obey*^g. Let no man deceive you with vain words: *He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as God is righteous*^h.

^g Rom. vi. 16.^h 1 John iii. 7.

In our description of the man who can stand before the Lord, we have not yet taken notice of a principal part of his character drawn in my text. It is added, he *hath not sworn deceitfully*. When I look back to ancient ages, I see almost whole nations of Pagans, among whom an oath was a pledge of fidelity scarce ever broken. Even a dissolute heathen poet who was favourable to so many other vices, hath expressed the greatest abhorrence of this. How shameful is the degeneracy of nations called christian ! Thou Sovereign Father of the universe, forgive their depravity, and convert them. Let the best example, the most wholesome laws, and the strongest motives, unite in making those who profess this religion, the best of men. I should be unworthy, altogether unworthy of my place or office, if I feared to tell the highest among my hearers, that even the common oaths still practised by many, however trifling they may appear to the thoughtless or the debauched, shock the ears, and kindle the indignation of every serious christian, and render the man

who is addicted to them, totally unfit for approaching to God, whose name he affronts, and whose authority he despises. But I should be unjust to every principle of virtue and religion, if I hesitated to declare, that the riches of the Indies, purchased by one false or equivocating oath, are bought at too dear a price. I hail as the disciple of Jesus, the poorest man who can say, I have lost this world's goods, but by the grace of God, I have preserved my integrity. Much hast thou gained, thou happiest victor; and insignificant are the toys which thou hast lost. But the man who is wealthy, or powerful, by unjustifiable methods, who has not scrupled to perjure himself, or to involve others in that horrible crime; my soul, enter not into his secret, dwell not in his habitation. He is a corrupter of the society of men: how detestable must he be in the sight of God!

Thus keeping my text in view, I have delineated some features of that character, which is necessary to fit us for waiting on

God in his ordinances. I have pointed out some of those virtues which should adorn it, and laid open some of those vices which ought never to stain it. It may still be proper to be more particular; and as the display of real characters has a tendency to convey instruction more forcibly than general descriptions, it may not be unallowable to paint a few; such as I hope will be found in life, and such as I am sure we ought to imitate in those duties which suit our situation, if we wish to be acceptable in the sight of God.

First of all then, figure to yourselves an eminent merchant, who had enjoyed the happiness of a religious and virtuous education. From his infancy the sentiments of piety were wrought into his mind, and they were strengthened with his years. He was not exempted from the temptations that are incident to youth. He had often resisted them, but with sorrow he found that they had frequently been too powerful for him, or that he too easily

yielded to them. Yet with humble hope, he betook himself to the mercy of God, thro' the mediation of his Saviour. His heart was open to that divine influence, which is never denied to such as ask it. After many severe conflicts with his passions, he was happily confirmed in religion, and an established character amongst all who knew him. His fellow merchants, in every exigency, were ready to consult him, and to follow his advice. It was always dictated by integrity and good sense. The poor blessed him. To no public spirited design that lay within the reach of his abilities, did he ever refuse his aid : neither his friends, his family, nor the state, had ever reason to reproach him. The regularity of his public devotions, and the chearfulness of his temper were equally remarkable. No man suspected that he was remiss in the private duties of religion ; but he was so secret in the performance of them, that the seasons he set apart for this purpose, were scarcely known to those who lived in the same house with

him. A variety of incidents would occur in such a man's life, that could not fail to discover his religious temper. It may be instructive to specify a few.

A neighbour who was the father of a numerous family came to him one day, and told him that by his interposition he could receive a supply of a certain kind of merchandize which would be a mean of saving his credit, and preventing the ruin of his family. He happened to have a large quantity of the same goods on hand. The bringing more must hurt his prophet considerably ; but humanity and religion did not suffer him to hesitate a moment. He granted his request. The embarrassed circumstances of another neighbour made him willing to dispose of certain effects below their real value. He made the offer to the man whose character I am now delineating. He paid him at the common rate, and suspecting that vanity might partly have prompted him, almost condemned himself for saying, I never yet took ad-

vantage of any man : God forbid that I should begin with you. To recount all the good offices of such a man, whose life was dedicated to virtue and religion, were endless. There was scarce a day of his life, in which some generous or friendly, some charitable or pious action would not be told of him by his neighbours ; and no evening would ever pass away, in which he was not ready to say, I prostrate myself, O God, before thy throne ; Lord be merciful to me a sinner. To this man we may persuade ourselves the favour of heaven would not be wanting. Temperance and activity would naturally conduce to his health ; nor will ye wonder that his affairs prospered in consequence of his industry and prudence, joined to the blessing of God, and the confidence of those with whom he was connected in business. It would rather be strange if in his case the observation of Solomon were not verified : *In wisdom's right hand is length of days, and in her left hand are riches and honour* ¹. I reverence

¹ Prov. iii. 16.

this character ; and were I in company with such a person, I should be apt in the overflowing of my heart to cry out, Peace is in the dwelling of the upright, and the favour of God shall not depart from him. I should be solicitous to know the secret emotions of his soul. I believe him to be a saint, and I should not be surprized if he spoke to me in some such terms as these. “ I am
 “ conscious that the world, often unjust to
 “ better men, ascribes to me more than I
 “ deserve. On a thousand things in my
 “ past life, I look back with regret. I am
 “ not insensible to the pleasures of goodness, but cannot help at the same time
 “ feeling and lamenting the disorders of
 “ my heart, and the errors of my conduct.
 “ I adore the all-perfect Being, and humble
 “ myself before him in dust and ashes.
 “ In the meritorious obedience, the unspotted sacrifice, and the powerful intercession of Jesus, I place my only hope.”
 Would to God, that in most of its features, this character were a just representation of many in this assembly.

Human life, my brethren, is a diversified scene. A single character gives but a confined representation of it. My profession calls me to the practice of many duties, and to the exercise of some virtues, which are not so immediately necessary in your station. You are subjected to many difficulties, and exposed to many snares, from which my lot in the world has exempted me. To give therefore a more extensive view of the man who will be acceptable in his approaches to God, let us subjoin some other characters.

In the same place, we shall suppose, there lived a person very different in several respects from him we have already described. Let those scenes which marked his early days, and which he now laments, be for ever buried in oblivion. Being afterwards the father of a numerous family, he was by some of the severer domestick afflictions led to consideration. Consideration produced repentance ; and by the grace of God, repentance for the past ended in a

thorough reformation for the future. A train of evils however seemed still to attend him. At first his faith wavered ; but often tried, it grew stronger every day. Perhaps too great severity succeeded his former dissipation ; but the regrets he felt, and the calamities he suffered, rendered this very pardonable. Of many it has been remarked, that age, other pursuits, and different cares have produced a change to the better : But concerning him every one was ready to say, How powerful is religion, and how visible are the effects of divine grace ! The reflection upon his own failings rendered him wonderfully mild in his judgment of others, but engaged him in many acts of mortification, which were termed superstitious by the uncandid, but which he apprehended to be necessary in his case, and therefore of religious obligation. A series of distress still pursued him. Deprived at last of the consolations he was wont to receive from a virtuous and affectionate wife, bereft of many hopeful children, sunk into poverty by unavoidable

disasters, so many misfortunes brought wrinkles on his countenance, and gave an early greyness to his locks. With his eyes lifted to heaven, whilst the tears flow down his cheeks, imagine you hear this son of affliction thus addressing himself to his Creator ; O my God, pity and support me. My sufferings are not equal to my sins, yet, merciful Father, remember I am dust, lay not on me more than I am able to bear. But whatever it may please thy providence to inflict, preserve me from repining, and have mercy on me for his sake who was acquainted with grief and suffering, and who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Nothing can strike that is not particular ; let us attend then more narrowly to this man's character. It was distinguished by patience, self-denial, and fortitude. After his reformation, no man could hear him say, I have done every thing, but Providence frowns upon me. Being pressed to receive benefactions from some who knew his situation, he who in his better days had given liberally, would reply to this purpose :

“ When I can struggle no longer, I will
 “ readily and gratefully accept the assist-
 “ ance of others ; but while my health and
 “ capacity remain, I shall never receive
 “ what ought to be bestowed on the more
 “ indigent and helpless.” Suppose him at
 length on the bed of death, in full posses-
 sion of his reason, would it not be natural
 for him to express his sentiments in some
 such manner as this ; O my friends, love
 God. Adhere to the laws of Jesus Christ,
 and know that your labour shall not be in
 vain. You behold me worn out with age,
 and overwhelmed with calamities ; but
 without the consolations of religion I had
 been utterly wretched and undone. My
 warfare is now accomplished. Gracious
 God, forgive the errors of my youth, and
 the sins of my riper years. My soul re-
 vives within me. The grace of my Re-
 deemer gives me new strength. O conduct
 me from this valley of tears to the regions
 of glory and felicity. Come Lord Jesus,
 come quickly. Who is not ready in such
 a case to say in the words of Balaam, *Let*

me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his ! ^k But to proceed.

In the sight of God, my brethren, no station is mean. In his view it is not rank, but conduct only, that can dignify or disgrace. Let us suppose then a person, whose birth, education and natural endowments confine him to one of the lowest spheres of life. While he serves his fellow mortal, he shews himself the servant of God. The ordinary duties of his station are not very extensive or very numerous, but he is thoroughly conscientious in the performance of them. His integrity and assiduity are irreproachable : Uncorrupted by the vices of others, he neither purloins his master's goods, nor permits his interest to suffer by his negligence. The maxims of honour and meanness which depend upon a commerce with the world, and which are not without their use, do not actuate him, he is influenced by nobler and more rational motives, he acts from singleness of heart, fearing God whom

^k Numb. xxiii. 10.

He knows to be no respecter of persons. He considers himself as one who is bought by the blood of Christ, in whom there is no distinction of rich or poor, or bond or free; and that gratitude and duty bind him to obey his laws. He knows that every faithful disciple of Jesus is an heir of eternal happiness. This raiseth him above the world. Satisfied with the humble greatness of a good conscience, he deserves more respect than thousands that are clad in purple and fine linen.

But to impress your minds with a sense of those virtues which are required in the worshippers of God, why should I have recourse to such descriptions as these? The scripture itself has in various places in the strongest and liveliest manner described the conduct that is necessary for fitting us to appear before the Lord. Let us select some of the most remarkable passages where this subject is treated. The whole of the fifteenth psalm is taken up in describing a citizen of Zion. It begins with a question

exactly the same with that in our text, *Lord; Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?* Attend carefully to the answer which is given.

The import of the inquiry in the sixth chapter of Micah is the same; and the answer is coincident. There is a strange tendency in the corrupted nature of man, to apprehend that he can please God by mere external observances. This is strongly exemplified in the Jews, and no less strongly exposed by the prophets, who never fail to insist on the necessity of a holy and beneficent life. *Wherefore, say the Jews, have we fasted, and thou seest not¹?* And what says the prophet? *Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow^m.*

The doctrine of our divine master, who came not to destroy the law or the prophets,

¹ If. lviii. 3.

^m Chap. i. 16.

but to fulfil them, entirely corresponds to this. In his sermon upon the mount, none are termed blessed, but those who were possessed of the several virtues there recommended. No man could be a disciple, or, according to the phrase of scripture, *enter into the kingdom of heaven*, whose *righteousness* did not *exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees*ⁿ. The whole tenor of the gospel declares, that *in Christ Jesus circumcision availeth nothing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature*^o. Such of his parables as most fully display the mercy of his dispensation, particularly those of the pharisee and publican, and of the prodigal son, do likewise shew the necessity of an humble spirit, and a right temper, in order to acceptance with the supreme judge. There is not a greater blasphemy against the Son of God, than to suppose that he meant by his doctrine to loosen the obligations of virtue and purity, of which he exhibited in his life so perfect a pattern, and which in his teaching he recommends with so much

ⁿ Mat. v. 20^o Gal. vi. 15.

warmth and energy. I might also insist on the example of those, whose history the scripture records for our instruction. I might describe the righteousness of Abel, of Noah, of Abraham; the virtue of Joseph, the meekness of Moses, the integrity of Samuel, the patience of Job, the fortitude of the prophets, the zeal, the charity, and the magnanimity of the apostles. To illustrate the same point, I might discourse on the penitence of David, the contrition of Peter, and the happy consequences with which they were followed. In short, the whole of the bible from beginning to end would conspire in confirming that ancient oracle of heaven, *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door* ^p, and in teaching this important principle, *That the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord* ^q; but that the cry of the righteous reacheth to the throne of God, and that the lifting up of their hands is acceptable as the *morn- ing and the evening sacrifice*.

^p Gen. iv. 7.

^q Prov. xxviii. 9.

I shall now conclude with a few reflections. In the first place, since the character which is requisite for rendering us acceptable worshippers of God, is so pure and holy, how careful should we be to inquire whether it is ours? We are so constituted, that the presence of a fellow creature gives us a desire of appearing to him in a favourable light. This desire is sensibly felt before an equal, but it exerts itself more strongly before a superior. Even the most virtuous are not without a wish to know by what honest means they may render themselves agreeable. If this is natural, how inexcusable must it be to approach precipitately the presence of that Being, before whom the angels cover their faces with their wings? Need I say, that his approbation is of more importance than that of the whole world? Need I show that his favour is life, and his loving kindness is better than life? How solicitous then should we be to know, whether we are the objects of it? Let us therefore attend to the language of our conduct, and examine

the disposition of our hearts. This is not a work to be gone about slightly ; it ought to be performed with the utmost seriousness and strictness. If we find that the love of God and man has been the main spring of our actions, let us give God the glory, and resolve, that by his grace strengthening us we will persevere, and go on to perfection. To serious resolutions let us add fervent prayers to God, addressing him in the words of the psalmist, *Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* ^r.

Finally, since that conduct and temper which God requires in those who approach him, is so blameless and holy, what reason have we all to humble ourselves in his sight, and to acknowledge and deplore our unworthiness ? *We have all sinned and come short of his glory* ^s, and were he strict to mark iniquity, we could not stand before him,

^r Pf. cxxxix. 23, 24

^s Rom. iii. 23.

nor answer for one of a thousand†. The best men are far below the standard of perfection, and too sensible of their defects to plead their virtue at the tribunal of justice, or to challenge as their right the friendship of the supreme. And how far are we below the character of the best? With what contrition should a review of our past offences fill our minds? and what humility should the consciousness of our present frailties inspire? Happy is the man who has been early led into the paths of virtue, and pursues his journey towards perfection with unremitting steps. Happy in the next degree the sinner, who, pierced with a sense of his guilt and misery, flees from both by a speedy repentance, and implores pardon in the blood of Christ. If you, my brethren, perceive the beauty of holiness, if you love it, and if you resolve to practice it, come to God in humble confidence of his mercy thro' Jesus your redeemer, by whom we are warranted to assure you that ye shall not be rejected. It is your Saviour's cha-

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† Job ix. 3.

rafter, that *he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax*^u. If you are sick of sin, and weary of its bondage, be not afraid of applying to him who is the physician of the sick, and the deliverer of the captive. With the outstretched arms of unbounded compassion he will receive you, and will treat you as his brethren, and his friends. *Ye shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of your salvation.*

^u Mat. xii. 20.

S E R M O N XII.

L U K E XV. II.—24.

And he said, A certain man had two sons : and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat : and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise,

and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

TH E company to which our Saviour addressed his discourse at this time, consisted of men who had very different characters, and who, to outward appearance, were very unlike in their manners. The

publicans, who were the collectors of the taxes imposed by the Romans, and who were extremely disagreeable to the Jews both on account of their office and their behaviour in the execution of it, with many others equally notorious for their vices, made up one class of his hearers. The other class consisted of the scribes and pharisees, whose pretences to purity and sanctity were very high, who treated those who differed from them with the most supercilious contempt, assuming an exclusive privilege of being accounted holy ; while at the same time their hearts were altogether vitiated and corrupted.

The parables recorded in this chapter are admirably calculated for instructing the former of those classes in the extent of the divine mercy, and thus engaging them to fly to its protection, and for reproving the uncharitableness and self-sufficiency of the latter. In the two first parables, that of the lost sheep and that of the lost piece of silver, we may discern the address of our Saviour as a

teacher. The strongest reasons for hope are explicitly conveyed to the publicans and sinners : but the rebuke to the scribes and pharisees is oblique and concealed. Thus the attention of one part of his audience is roused, and their affections gained : and by the force of truth, delivered in the most engaging manner, the murmurings of the pharisees on account of our Saviour's keeping company with sinners are made gradually to subside. In the third parable, which begins at the eleventh verse, in a narration the most simple and natural, all those circumstances are united, which, while they enlighten the understanding, are at the same time proper for touching the heart. We here discover this divine teacher shewing, with equal clearness, his enlarged mind, his compassionate heart, his awful authority, and his nervous eloquence. I have confined myself at present to that part of this parable which chiefly presents to us the misery of vice, the disposition of a true penitent, and the mercy of God. The decorum and propriety with which our

Saviour conducts his allegories, and their excellence, not only as sources of moral instruction, but as patterns of just and fine writing, are very remarkable. Instead of darkening a plain passage by a tedious critical commentary, I choose in the present case to justify the remark I have now made by the following observations.

It is the younger of the two sons who is impatient of his father's restraint, and asks for a portion of his goods. His youth and his inexperience plead some excuse for his levity, his impatience, and the rashness of his request. The haste with which this young man, as is observed in the 13th verse, collected all he had, in order to fulfil his designs, is extremely agreeable to the fire and impetuosity of youth, and to the violence of eager and ungratified passions. There is also a circumstance taken notice of in the same verse, which interests the reader in his favour, and prepares us in some measure to expect his recovery : it is, that *he took his journey into a far country*. By this

it is hinted that, though bent upon vice and resolved to indulge himself in it, yet he was not lost to shame, nor to the force of every other virtuous principle. The eye of a father would have proved too severe a check upon him, and his authority too great a hindrance to his unlawful pursuits. Beyond the reach of that eye which would have inspired him with reverence, he therefore resolves to live, and the interposition of that authority which his nature would not have suffered him to have contemned, he determines by his distance to render impracticable.

The intention of our Saviour's discourse discovers the propriety of his relating briefly the manner in which this young man squandered his fortune. It was not his design to render him too much an object of detestation. He therefore does not paint his vices in those strong colours, in which we know from other descriptions that he was so able to draw them. It is sufficient at present to denote them by the name of

riotous living. It is natural to imagine, that extravagance will be the parent of want : but it is also natural to suppose, that influenced by some timely warning, one may be brought to reflect and to recover himself before he is plunged in the very depth of misery. This supposition, the history in the present case for a little seems to favour, and the intimating all at once the extremity of the wretched, forlorn and despicable condition of this thoughtless youth, more strongly excites the feeling of surprize and sympathy, from the mixture of which we receive those emotions of sorrow which the human mind approves of and upon the whole delights in. *He joined himself to a citizen of that country, but alas ! he was sent into the fields to feed swine, and he would have been glad to have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat ; and no man gave unto him.* These expressions convey to every one the ideas of a mean and servile employment, and extreme indigence. But they impressed a Jew still more strongly. These animals whose flesh

the Jews were not allowed to eat, and whose carcases they were prohibited to touch, this young man, who once had so different prospects, was now obliged to attend as a keeper, and even envied them the food which they devoured. On account of his wretchedness he is forced to give up the rights of his birth, the prerogative of his former station; and want conquers that antipathy which his education, his prejudices, and his religion had so deeply riveted in his nature.

But affliction produced in him sober thoughts. In the 17th verse, we are told that *he came to himself*. Vice and immorality is one species, and perhaps the worst species of madness. And therefore in ancient languages, wisdom and virtue are often considered as signifying the same thing; so in like manner are vice and folly, or madness. I think in this there is great propriety. For madness, according to the general acceptation, means such an extravagant deviation from the ordinary apprehensions

and actions of men, as discovers either the want, or total derangement of some of the principal faculties which men daily exercise in common life. Now vice is the same deviation from the established constitution of nature, and the same violation of its laws as madness is of the ordinary practice of mankind.

E very thing in this parable is animated. No tedious descriptions, nor tiresome relations. The whole is transacted, not narrated. The speech with which the prodigal resolves to accost his father, paints in the most expressive language, the wretchedness of his state, and the penitence and humility of his heart.

In the 20th verse we read, that *when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him*. Does not every circumstance display the character of the tender parent? The eye which age and affliction had rendered dim, notwithstanding the

squalid and miserable appearance of the traveller, at a distance recognizes his own son. Affection warms the father's blood, gives suppleness to his joints, and speed to his feet. The interruption which the father makes in the 22d verse to the premeditated discourse of his son, relieves from the langour of a repetition, and discovers in a moving manner, the strong affections and overflowing sympathy of the father's heart. In the charge given to the servants, and the reasons by which it is enforced, are strongly marked the generosity of the father's disposition, the naked and miserable condition of the prodigal, the unfeigned joy at his return, and the gracious manner in which he was received.

Upon the whole, this parable appears to me one of the most simple, natural and animated pieces of composition. But its excellence in these respects constitutes the least part of its merit. What may be termed the body of the discourse, the language and the incidents, are elegant and striking :

and the soul, the sentiments and the moral instruction which it conveys are so just and important, that they entirely correspond. Let us now consider it in this latter light.

I need not inform any person, that the father is intended to represent to us the Almighty, who is the universal parent of heaven and earth, *who openeth his hand and liberally satisfieth the wants of his creatures* : or that in the younger son, is figured the character of a sinner, who regardless of the ties of duty and gratitude, forsakes the laws of God, and follows the corrupt devices of his own heart. All this is extremely obvious : and yet scarcely any thing more is necessary for making us fully comprehend the moral instructions that are justly founded on this parable ; for we are not to search for the moral of every circumstance. Such disquisitions are generally harmless, and may sometimes be useful ; but they rather tend to withdraw our attention from the chief end of parables. The properest way of treating them seems to be, to observe and

enforce the general purposes for which they were spoken : and to point out these, does not require much acuteness or penetration. They are for the most part extremely evident. For instance, does not every one see that the portion of the parable now under consideration is principally calculated for the purposes I formerly hinted at, to represent to us, 1st the fatal consequences of rashness, folly and vice ; 2dly the disposition and temper of a true penitent ; and lastly, the mercy of God, and his readiness to receive every returning sinner. Keeping these three objects in our view, I shall again review the history of this prodigal son, and apply what may be said as we go along.

Uneasy under the restraint which a father's presence imposed, this young man is anxious to leave his own country, and to fulfil all the desires of his heart. Having obtained from an indulgent parent, a share of his estate, he immediately undertakes his journey. At this instant, let us contemplate him, young, healthy, unexperi-

enced, elevated with the present, fearless of the future, his eye indicating the rapture of his heart; his soul prognosticates the highest joy, and he thinks himself the happiest of mortals. What scenes of pleasure does he revolve in his mind! and he longs for nothing but the day in which he shall gratify all his wishes. But why should he fear the presence of a father? why fly from the sight of a man, whom he knows to be the object of reverence? His heart even now sometimes misgives him, and virtue offers her sacred admonitions. But the flattery and intoxication of vice push him on, and regardless of every wise and sober reflection, he hastens to his ruin. His money becomes the mean of his destruction. His appetites grow every day more irregular and rapacious, and he purchases every object that can gratify them. The light of reason sometimes rises in his soul. He extinguishes it by plunging in vice. Many a time has conscience offered to be his monitor: by the most infamous debauchery he checks her admonitions, till for a season, she has relinquished her office. Why should I

recount all the dishonest deeds, the impure thoughts, and the unworthy pleasures of a man, who follows the corrupt inclinations of his heart, and is deserted by God? A companion of profligates, tyrannized over by his lusts, avoided by every good man, he must soon feel the misery, which, though contrary to his intention, he has so directly and assiduously earned. So it happened to this prodigal. *He wasted his substance, and he began to be in want.* How great and how fatal was this change! Accustomed to eat before he was hungry, to drink before he was thirsty, never to suffer the call of any appetite to remain unanswered, how wretched does he now feel himself, deprived not only of the superfluities, but of the very necessities of life! Where are now the companions of his better days, the partakers of his riotous and unholy pleasures! Where is the friend in whom he trusted, the mistress with whom he squandered, or the servants that were obedient to his call? They are all fled; the blast of winter is come; and those insects that only wanted in the sun-shine of summer,

are for ever vanished. The extremity to which he is reduced, obliges him to submit to the meanest and most despicable employment.

Observe him now, and remark the alteration which sin has produced. What hopes and expectations did his look betoken when he left his father's house? What joy did it express, when he was rioting in wantonness? behold now, what dejection, and what despair! The nicest art was employed in preparing garments to set off his youth and beauty to advantage: behold now, rags scarcely protect him from the cold; the beggar and he wear the same attire. The beggar, who was never in a better state, receives with gratitude every morsel, and tastes it with pleasure: to this youth, the remembrance of the past imbitters the present. Removed from a paradise to a wilderness, from a false paradise to a real wilderness, the sharpest arrow of affliction pierces his breast, and the tears he sheds discover a heart overwhelm-

ed with the bitterest grief. I almost forget his sins, and I compassionate his sufferings. But we have not seen the half of them. His outward misery strikes the eye, but it is only the shadow of his inward anguish. How shall I paint to you the remorse that preys upon his heart, and the agitations that distract his soul! Fortune, thy attacks are severe, but the attacks of guilt are intolerable. Bodily infirmity may be borne, *but a wounded spirit, who can bear? When the arrows of the Almighty stick fast in a man, then indeed is he troubled, and bowed down mightily. He is feeble and sore broken: He roareth by reason of the disquietness of his heart. His heart panteth, and his strength faileth him.* In what a different light does the prodigal now view his immorality, his debauchery, his impiety? A thousand thoughts present themselves: but every one is more excruciating than another. All his vices pass in review before him. They are like the ghosts of the murdered, and they seem to intreat that the vengeance of heaven may overtake him. Is this pic-

ture too much heightened? I really believe it is not: and could we look with impartial eyes at the havock which sin makes in a human soul, I am persuaded we should confess the justness of this portrait. We enter into a lazarus-house, and we see our fellow-creatures oppressed with some inveterate and unremitting distemper, or smitten with one universal fore, Nature shrinks at the sight. Oh! for the eye of angels properly to discern the diseases of the soul, to perceive the blackness of guilt, the horror of an awakened conscience! Then every sight that is now sickening would become almost pleasing in comparison of the loathsomeness of these. Vice repeated and persevered in, is the only object which makes angels relinquish the charge of mortals, and fly from their society as we fly from the place infected with the plague.

But there is no room left for repentance, no place for pardon? To all the evils of sin is that last and most intolerable one to be added, the despair of a recovery? No,

my brethren, it is not. This history discovers to us the disposition of a true penitent; and our Saviour, who relates this history, presents this disposition at the throne of God, and irresistibly pleads for its acceptance.

The evil of sin lies in the soul. Before it is removed therefore the soul must undergo some alteration. It is vain to imagine, that true penitence consists in external observances or costly offerings. If you could sacrifice *thousands of rams*, and make an oblation of *ten thousand rivers of oil*: if you should give *your first-born for your transgressions*; *the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul*, still you might be a stranger to that temper which gained the prodigal so welcome a reception. When one receives a wound, we do not apply bandages and ointments to his garments, but to the part affected. The diseases of the soul in like manner are not cured by extrinsic and foreign applications, but by something that is inward and congenial. Now repentance

is that medicine which, by the blessing of God and the operations of his spirit, cureth the soul of sin ; and it consists in a serious sense of our transgressions, a deep humility on account of them, a sincere contrition of heart, accompanied with an ingenuous confession, and an unshaken resolution of amendment.

All these particulars are either expressed or implied in the temper of the returning prodigal. *I will say to my father ; Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants.* He has such a strong sense of his past folly, that he acknowledges he has forfeited the rights of his birth. He asks not the privilege of a son, but the protection of a servant. His whole speech discovers the genuineness of his sorrow, and the deepness of his contrition ; far from endeavouring to cover or palliate his transgressions, he confesses them in the most open and affecting manner. The expression of his resolution of

amendment is the only thing which seems here to be wanting; but this very circumstance gives us a new occasion to observe the wonderful propriety and inimitable beauty of our Saviour's discourses. The prodigal had been engaged in such scenes of wickedness that the reflection upon them quite overwhelmed him. He scarcely durst promise upon his own treacherous heart. And having so far and so causelessly offended, he blushes to declare his resolution of amendment. He leaves it to his look, his manner, the whole spirit of his discourse, to speak the secret but firm purpose of his soul. Is not this a conduct at once the most engaging, becoming and noble? and does not the representation of it discover to us one of those delicate strokes of description which distinguish a master?

I might expatiate upon each of the particulars implied in repentance, shew their connection, and explain how one of these naturally leads to another, in the order I have mentioned them. Without a sense

of sin, it is plain, we cannot feel the first emotions of penitence. But a sense of sin seriously entertained, is a natural source of humility; for when we consider our corruptions and vices, we cannot esteem ourselves, but are ashamed and abashed on account of them. In this state, our heart, formed to discern and aspire after what is excellent, is affected with a feeling of its own defects. Overwhelmed with grief, we find no ease but in an honest confession; and from this very act we are formed to derive some consolation. Resolution of amendment is the natural consequence of these previous steps; and indeed the only course which remains for us to take. Your time will not permit me to insist more fully upon these particulars. Let me only produce a few texts of scripture, to show that the disposition now described is the only acceptable sacrifice to God, and indispensably necessary in christians. It was a prevailing error among the Israelites, that God would be pleased with a variety of oblations: their prophets are careful to correct

this error, and to lead them to just sentiments upon this subject. *Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee. I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goat out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats^a? To the same purpose, David in another place says, *Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it. Thou delightest not in burnt-offering; and immediately after declares, agreeably to our doctrine, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise^b. He that confesseth his sins, and forsaketh them, saith the wise man, the same shall find mercy; but he that**

^a Psalm l. 7—14.

^b Psalm li. 16, 17.

*covereth his sins, shall not prosper^c. And in the new testament, destruction is denounced against all who do not repent. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish^d. In the parable of the pharisee and publican^e, the latter, who was ashamed on account of his sins, who stood at a distance, and beat upon his breast, and said, *God be merciful to me a sinner: went down to his house justified, rather than the other.**

But in the third place: In this parable is represented to us the mercy of God, and his readiness to receive every returning sinner. This is the perfection of the divine nature, in which, as offending creatures, we are principally interested. By his goodness he is the object of the love and veneration of angels. From its emanations they receive their felicity, and, dwelling at the fountain of joy, they know no sorrow. But goodness itself, strict impartial goodness, is the object of terror to a weak imperfect creature like man, conscious of his

^c Prov. xxviii. 13. ^d Luke xiii. 3. ^e Luke x.

fin, and repeated offences. Goodness engages the being that is possessed of it, to be beneficent, to bestow the means of happiness, but not to restore them if they have been misapplied and squandered. When I survey the justice of the Divinity, I tremble in his presence; and were I ignorant of every other moral perfection of his nature, I should pray to be reduced to nothing. When I view his goodness, I admire and adore it; but I envy the angels who never fell, and who are the objects of its complacency. But when I see him clothed in his mercy, I glory in my lot as a man, and raise my eyes to immortality. Now it is this attribute which is represented to us in this parable. When the prodigal had wasted all, when he was ruined and undone, and was obliged to return to that father whom he had disregarded and dishonoured; we read, *while he was yet a great way off, he had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.* Does not this teach us that, *like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth every repenting sinner.* Even under the severity of the

old dispensation, the Omnipotent had declared himself *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. With him, it was at that period declared, there was mercy, that he might be feared, and plenteous redemption; and he remembered the frame of mortals, that they were but dust.* But still clearer declarations of the mercy and placability of God are afforded to us under the new dispensation, in which Christ himself is the law-giver. The heavenly voice at his birth proclaimed, *Peace on earth, and good-will to men:* as if all that had yet been known, was only to be compared to some scattered rays which preceded the rising of the sun. One great part of our Saviour's employment, during the whole of his ministry, was to display the divinity in his mildest aspect, and by this means, to *heal the broken in heart, and to bind up the wounded in spirit.* And finally, this Saviour, by an unspotted obedience, and a meritorious death, made *mercy and truth to meet together, righteousness and peace to kiss each other.*

Having now considered the fatal consequences of vice, the disposition of a true penitent, and the exuberant mercy of God; let us in a few sentences apply what has been said.

Is vice the direct road to misery and ruin? Does not daily experience convince us that it is? While the common accidents of life slay their thousands, this evil alone killeth her ten thousands. Let this teach us to consider it as our greatest enemy. If there were a general reformation in a country, I could scarcely number up the train of diseases, misfortunes, and afflictions which would disappear at once by its means: for trace our calamities to the source, and it will be found that vice is the chief one. *Let the wicked man forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let all who are not yet initiated in sin, beware of it, for verily it bringeth a snare to his soul.*

2dly, Since the disposition of a true penitent is so pleasing in the sight of God,

what reason has every one of us, to endeavour to obtain it ! The Almighty shews the value he has for a human soul, by preferring its renewal to every other sacrifice. There is a strange propensity in corrupt man, to endeavour to please God in some different manner; but this is the only way that is acceptable. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sabbaths, your new-moons, and your oblations ? Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings, cease to do evil, learn to do well.* What occasion we all have for this, let our lives and our manners testify. Does that piety, integrity or purity prevail among us, which become the gospel ? Is that love to God, and regard to his laws, which the gospel enjoins, the ruling principle of our lives ? Would to God it were ! after all, there should remain sufficient defects to lament. But as it is otherwise, how deep ought our humiliation to be ! Let us acknowledge our transgressions, and be diligent to search out the plague of our own hearts, and *turn unto God, who will have mercy ; and unto our God, who will abundantly pardon.*

Lastly, This mercy of God which is displayed in the scriptures, ought to be the object of our praise and adoration. We are enabled to view God, and yet we are not consumed. *Bless the Lord, then, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities. He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever: he hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities; for as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him: as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

S E R M O N XIII.

M A T T H E W xi. 29.

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for
I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye
shall find rest unto your souls.*

IN the primitive ages of christianity, there could be no inducement for any one to assume the character of a christian, but his being persuaded of the truth of the gospel, and of its efficacy to procure salvation to those who obeyed its precepts. Men at that time very rarely engaged in any of the external exercises of religion, but from a sense of the obligation they lay under to purity and integrity, the ultimate ends of all religion. But now the case seems to be much altered for the worse. While the pious frequent religious assemblies out of devotion, regard the name of christian as the most honourable appellation, and confess that their profession of faith in Jesus

lays them under the strongest obligation to obey his laws ; a very considerable number assemble with these from very different motives, consider the name of christian only as a proper badge in a christian land, and profess themselves believers only thro' custom, or to obtain some temporal advantages with which the profession is attended, or to avoid some inconveniences which renouncing it altogether might occasion. Though they join in the forms of religion, they never consider this as laying them under an obligation to comply with the precepts of it, or seem to apprehend that they are guilty of hypocrisy, or what the scripture calls a mocking of God, for the pretence which they make of honouring him outwardly, when they feel no reverence for his perfections, and no regard for his will.

There is however one institution of religion, a participation in which is still considered, in this country at least, as a solemn avowal of the obligation to observe the laws of christianity ; an institution from which

the abandoned generally abstain, and in which, while he rashly engages, the heart of the hypocrite will scarcely fail to smite him. As you therefore of this congregation have it so nearly in view, to celebrate this sacred institution of the Lord's supper, the participation in which is considered as an acknowledgment that we are bound to receive the yoke of Christ, I have made choice of the words now read, as a proper foundation for the present discourse.

In the 27th verse of this chapter, our Saviour had asserted his divine commission, his authority and power, and his intimate knowledge of his father, and near relation to him. *All things are delivered to me of my father: and no man knoweth the son but the father, neither knoweth any man the father, save the son, and he to whomsoever the son will reveal him.* Then he who so well knew how to unite the characters of just dignity, and winning condescension, immediately subjoins one of the most affectionate invitations, which he ever addressed to mankind. Of this my text is a part.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest: Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

The yoke of Christ is a metaphor to signify his laws and commandments; and the taking of this yoke upon us denotes a submission to these. To learn of Christ, comprehends a general attention to the doctrines he teaches, as well as to the precepts he enjoins, and has also a reference to the example he exhibits. The two following clauses, *For I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls*, may be considered as motives to engage our compliance with the exhortation in the preceding part of the verse. Our Saviour takes notice of his being *meek and lowly in heart*, both for the tendency which these dispositions would have to conciliate affection and confidence, and for distinguishing him from the Jewish doctors, who affected a disgusting pride and superiority; qualities which, to

say the truth, human learning, when it is not conducted with a spirit of sober inquiry, and made subservient to the purposes of virtue and religion, is apt to inspire. By the *rest of the soul*, is meant that state of quiet composure and serenity, which ought to be the chief pursuit of a wise man : and this expression must have been easily understood by those who heard our Saviour, especially as it had been used in a similar manner by one of their prophets. *Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls* ^a.

In prosecuting this subject, after saying a few things upon the nature and extent of the christian law, which is here called the yoke of Christ, I propose to lay before you the obligations we are under to submit to it, and to confirm the sense of these obligations by several arguments, es-

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^a Jeremiah vi. 16

pecially those suggested in the text. We shall be best able to discover the nature of the christian law, by attending to the design for which it was published. Now it was published with this view, to recover the fallen race of mankind, and to restore them to the image of God, by rectifying their irregular appetites, by cultivating in their minds every disposition that is virtuous and praise-worthy. The excellence of this law therefore consists in its fitness to answer these ends. As Christ came to destroy the kingdom of Satan, and to *purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works* ^b, his rules and precepts are all calculated for restraining vice, and promoting holiness; or, to use the words of an apostle, *to teach us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly* ^c.

This law, which is pure, as the nature of God, the fountain whence it proceeded, is as extensive as the principles of our nature

^b Tit. ii. 14.

^c Tit. ii. 12.

would allow, or as was necessary to fit us for a more perfect and comprehensive state, to which the present is preparatory. Thus it comprehends all the duties we owe to God, every branch of piety, as love, gratitude, reverence, fear; all the virtues of humanity, justice, charity, meekness, forbearance, with a variety of other duties that arise from different situations and circumstances in life; the virtues of temperance, sobriety and chastity, to which we are so powerfully excited, by being represented as *temples of the living God*^a, as *habitations of God through the Spirit*^c.

The law of the Lord Jesus extends not to our actions only, but it engages those who comply with it to regulate their words, and to preserve purity in their most secret and retired thoughts. Like a medicine, which not only operates upon the larger organs, but penetrates the nerves, and affects the finest fibres, the christian law ex-

F 4

^a 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^c Eph. ii. 22.

tends to the nicest movements of the soul, and is intended to influence every principle by which the soul can be actuated.

I proceed now to lay before you some of the obligations you are under to submit to the law of the gospel, or to take upon you the yoke of Christ. May I speak in the simplicity of the gospel, and may the Spirit of Christ aid me in declaring your duty, in exciting you to comply with it !

In the first place then, you are under the strictest obligation to submit to the law, or yoke of Christ, because its reasonableness approves itself to your own minds.

When God formed man at first, he did not leave him to act in any manner that humour or passion might prompt him, but constituted him so, that when he should discern any thing to be reasonable or proper to be done, even supposing he should be willing to forego the advantages with which the doing it might be attended, or to suffer the evils in which the omitting

it might involve him, yet this should not satisfy him, but a departure from his duty should moreover be attended with a present sense of guilt, or ill-deserving, independent of the consequences. When any scheme of religion is laid before a man, which he acknowledges to be reasonable, and with which notwithstanding he refuses to comply, he no longer uses the liberty of a man, but is domineered over by some appetite, or passion, or habit of subjection for which his own heart condemns him. Suppose therefore, that there were nothing more in christianity, but a simple detail of the different branches of our duty, we should be under the strictest obligation, from the very constitution of our nature, to comply with it ; and our refusing to comply would upon reflection have filled us with uneasiness. Man is not left, like the brutes, to follow the present strongest impulse of his mind, but has another superior faculty, which claims the privilege of a lawful master, and is entitled to have its commands obeyed. The

question with man ought not to be, which is the strongest propension, but which is the most reasonable. In this licentious age, it is necessary to insist upon this obligation, because many satisfy themselves in their impiety and irregularities by saying, that they are under no formal obligation to comply with the laws of religion, having done nothing to ratify the engagements into which others may have entered on their account. I am sure this is not the language of a man who uses his reasonable faculties. Your obligation to religion does not arise from the vow of your parents, or others, tho' it may be strengthened by that vow, but from the nature which God has given you. Before you disown this obligation then, renounce your nature. Acknowledge at once, that the boasted powers of reason and of conscience, you undervalue and contemn. Forsake the society of men. You claim the privilege of indulging every appetite and passion, without restraint: Herd with the beasts of the field: in similar pleasure you spend

your days. Degraded man ! O that I could sufficiently discover you to every eye as a monument of folly and of vice, that you might be pointed at by others, and that the contagion of your example might not spread. No ! rather like Nebuchadnezzar may your understanding return unto you, and with him, may you learn to praise and honour and extol the King of heaven and of earth, who hath not left you at liberty to reject his holy law without self-condemnation.

Thus the very declaration of the moral duties of the gospel to those who must, and do confess that they are reasonable, lays them under the strongest obligation to practise them. The eye is not more formed to discern a difference between white and black, or the taste to distinguish between sweet and bitter, than the mind is to perceive the distinction between good and evil : nor is it more absurd, to call black white, or bitter sweet, than it is un-

natural to reject the good and choose the evil.

But the obligation of christians to take upon them the yoke of Christ, does not arise merely from its reasonableness. This obligation is enforced by the highest authority, no less than that of God himself; for to the christian religion God hath given the strongest attestations, having appeared at various times, and in divers manners, to establish the law, the prophets, and the gospel; so that refusing to receive them is refusing to acknowledge the authority of God.

The different appearances of the Almighty are recorded for our instruction; and since they are sufficiently attested, they ought to produce a similar effect upon us, to that which they would have done, had we been witnesses of them. When God descended upon Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning, and the *voice of the trumpet*

waxed exceedingly loud^f, it was to deliver that moral law, which Christ came not to destroy, but to confirm ; and when we hear it as delivered by the Almighty, do we not tremble at his word, and reverence his authority ? *Let all nations bow before him, and let all people serve him.* The same eternal Being who appears thro' the old testament as the God of majesty and glory, appears also, tho' in a different manner, and adds his sanction to the new. He, who under the former dispensations, had discovered himself in his terrors, as an emblem of the law, condescends under the gospel, to shew himself less in the light of majesty than of love, as an emblem of the mildness of this latter dispensation. His Spirit descended on his Son like a dove, and he declared, *This is my beloved son ; hear ye him*^g. Here no fire is called from heaven to destroy a rebellious race, no immediate judgment is inflicted for dishonouring, not the servant, but the Son : on the contrary, the most marvellous works

^f Exod. xix. 19.^g Matth. xvii. 5.

of beneficence and mercy, which required the immediate interposition of heaven, are performed. And are not these so many proofs, that the religion which we profess, comes recommended by the divine authority? *The works that I do, saith our Saviour, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me* ^h.

To the still, small voice of God therefore, which speaks within our minds, and enjoins obedience to the laws of piety, justice, and charity, there is superadded the clear declaration of the same God in the scriptures, enjoining us to honour and obey the Son, as we ought to honour and obey the Father. Do I speak to an assembly of men who despise, and daringly reject this authority? Will you join with the impious king who hardened his heart, and said, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord, neither will I hearken to him* ⁱ. Surely not, my brethren: you reverence the authority of God. Remember then,

^h John v. 36.

ⁱ Exod. v. 2.

that it is the Son of God, by the authority of his Father, who says, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.*

But I proceed to consider our obligations to submit to the yoke of Christ, arising either from explicit, or implied acknowledgments: and on this subject, there are several things which I will throw together as briefly as possible. When you were baptized, did not your parents, or some others, become bound to train you up in the religion of Christ, and to instruct you in its principles? and have you not always considered this as a virtual engagement in your name? I know you never renounced it formally; but did you ever really endeavour so much as to satisfy your own minds for your neglect of it? Or when you deliberately reflect on this engagement, and your departures from it, do you not feel a secret conviction informing you that you are blameable? What is the language of your religious profession, of your retaining the name of christians, of

your claiming the outward privileges belonging to such? Every time that you address God, either in public, or in private, is it not a confession that you ought to obey his precepts? If you ever commemorated the death of Christ, or if you now propose to do it, is not this a solemn ratification of your baptismal vows? If you call him Lord, Lord, and yet do not the things which he prescribes, must you not own that your behaviour is altogether unworthy and inconsistent? For can any conduct be more inconsistent or contradictory, than to call him master, and yet refuse his authority? May he not justly say to you, *If I be a master, where is my fear? and if I be a father, where is mine honour*^k? Whenever you join therefore in any act of religion, and yet refuse obedience to the laws of the gospel, you acknowledge the justness of an authority, to which, notwithstanding, you refuse to submit; a conduct which your own hearts can certainly never approve of.

^k Mal. i. 6.

Having thus laid before you some of the obligations which we are under to receive the yoke of Christ, arising from our nature and constitution, from the regard due to the authority of God, and from our own explicit or implied engagements, let me endeavour to confirm the sense of these obligations by several motives; and this may be considered as a continuation in some measure of my former subject; for to a reasonable creature, a just motive is a proper ground for action, and lays him under an obligation to act accordingly.

In the first place, my brethren, the service to which you are bound, by submitting to this yoke, is both reasonable and easy. As christians, we are not loaded with the yoke of rites, ceremonies, and external observances, which was so heavy upon the Jews, that neither those in the days of our Saviour, *nor their fathers were able to bear it*¹. The dominion of Christ

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¹ Acts xv. 10.

tends to free us from the slavery of sin, from the power of Satan, from the tyrannic sway of our own lusts, and to make us obey the best principles of our nature, and yield to their dictates. The religion of the Lord Jesus is therefore called *the perfect law of liberty*^m. By engaging in his service, we are said to be *delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God*ⁿ; and christians are exhorted to *stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free*^o. Our Saviour also declares, immediately after the text, that his *yoke is easy*, and his *burden light*. The objection which arises to this from the weakness and depravity of our natures, I shall take occasion to obviate afterwards.

At present, I proceed to persuade you to comply with the advice in the text, from a review of the character of that Master, into whose service you are here called. I shall chiefly confine myself to the consideration

^m James i. 25. ⁿ Rom. viii. 21. ^o Gal. v. 1.

of those circumstances in his character, which are marked in the text. We are there told, that he is *meek and lowly in heart*; and how perfectly his actions correspond to this character, let his whole life testify. Can my soul ever forget his condescension to his disciples, his forbearance to his enemies, his patience under his afflictions, and the numberless good offices, by which he alleviated or removed the miseries of men? To display him fully in this character, need I bring to your remembrance that night in which *he rose from supper, and having laid aside his garments, girded himself with a towel, and washed his disciples feet*^p? Need I recal to your minds the compassionate manner in which he spoke to the daughters of Jerusalem, and desired them to reserve their tears for their own miseries, when they were pouring them out for his? What sinner did this meek and merciful Master ever reject, if he came with a penitent heart? It was foretold to

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^p John xiii. 4, 5.

be his character, and he still retains it, *that he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax*^q. How striking, and how beautiful is the prediction concerning him, and how fully did he accomplish it! *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young*^r. When you consider your weaknesses, your irresolution, your follies, and your vices, are you not sensible that it would be impossible for you ever to please an austere master? or could any other be a fit Lord for you but he who has a *fellow-feeling of your infirmities*^s? Your meek and lowly Master imposes upon you no tasks which he himself did not submit to. He is not like the pharisaical doctors who *said, and did not*, who *bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be born, and laid them on other mens shoulders, but would not touch them with one of their fingers*^t. In the severest

^q Isa. xlii. 3. Matt. xii. 20. ^r Isa. xl. 2.

^s Heb. iv. 15. ^t Matt. xxiii. 3, 4.

instances of our duty, he left us an example, that we should follow his steps. In what school can we learn, where the instructor would be so ready to bear our forwardness, to pardon our neglects, and forgive our faults? If you refuse this Saviour, where will you find one like him? for there is no encouragement that he refuses, no assistance that he denies.

This leads me to consider, as another motive to induce you to take his yoke upon you, which will likewise obviate every objection from the depravity of our nature, the gracious aids of his holy Spirit, which he will vouchsafe to all who sincerely ask them, and rely upon them. Our Saviour did not leave this world, till he had promised that the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, should come to teach and assist his followers. Whatever difficulties therefore we may meet with in our christian course, by the aid of the divine Spirit we may be rendered superior to them. If the combat in which we engage, in

order to subdue our irregular appetites, be severe, from the Spirit we may derive that strength which shall render us victorious. Do we labour under any disease whatever of the mind? By the help of that Physician who formed the heart, and knows its maladies, surely it may be cured. And, christians, *tho' we wrestle not against flesh, and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places*^u, yet by his Spirit who conquered the powers of darkness, and who overcame the world, all these may be resisted by us, and with such divine assistance, his yoke may be termed an *easy* one, and his burden *light*.

Finally, my brethren, attend to the promise that is here made to those who obey this exhortation. *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls*. What is there in this world that is so desirable, as a quiet, a

^u Eph. vi. 12.

contented, and a resigned spirit? Tell me who is the happy man; he who arrives at the top of his ambition, and tramples upon his foes, but is domineered over by his lusts? he who wallows in luxury by means of his ill-acquired riches, but has no government over himself; or he who in this transient state, feels that internal satisfaction which the world cannot give, nor take away? Ye soft gales of peace, which proceed from the Holy Ghost, and are kept up only by an unremitting virtue, be you my choice, and do you still refresh my soul. But where is that serenity and felicity to be found, except by submitting to the yoke of Christ? At the creation of man, religion was his companion, his perpetual attendant; and no care ruffled his brow, nor sorrow disquieted his breast; his eye beheld the lovely form, and his heart never strayed from her laws. But when he fell, his understanding was darkened, he lost sight of his true good, and pursued an imaginary happiness in a thousand delusive shapes. The experience however of every

age has sufficiently proved that even the imperfect share of happiness which we are now capable of attaining, is no where to be found disjoined from religion. *Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*; and besides that natural peace which a pious conduct is immediately calculated to produce, the christian has moreover that supernatural quiet and consolation to depend upon, which is promised by his Master, for composing and solacing his spirit. *Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*^z.

^z John xiv. 27.

S E R M O N XIV.

P S A L M iv. 4. last part of the verse.

*Commune with your own heart upon your bed,
and be still.*

THAT the royal prophet, by these words, enjoins retirement from the hurry and the tumults of human life, in order to give ourselves time deliberately to consider the wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of the divine administration, and seriously to reflect upon our own actions, and the motives of them, will, I imagine, be readily admitted by every hearer. *Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.* At leisure, uninfluenced by the specious opinions, unbiassed by the corrupt practices of others, deaf to the ensnaring voice of pleasure, and only open to the sober dictates of reason, and the awful commands of conscience, frequently meditate upon the perfections of

God, and learn to reverence the ways of his providence. Often before-hand consider the course of conduct which it becomes you to follow; and often review what you have thought and acted. You will all acknowledge that the nature and condition of man discover religious retirement and recollection to be highly proper and useful. When we consider our wants, our weakness, our dependence, the dangers to which we are exposed, the hopes and the fears, as well as the immediate happiness and misery which our conduct occasions; they all conspire to force this acknowledgment. But how seldom our practice is influenced by it, let our conscience and our actions bear witness. For if the man who is of opinion that a frequent and serious consideration of one's own behaviour, his dispositions, and the awful account he must render, might, by the blessing of God, prove a remedy for many vices, would but visit the market-places, the taverns, and crowded, or private companies; or inquire into the case of the oppressed,

or lend an ear to the wailing of the poor ; or observe the cheats in business, the chicanery of law, the haughtiness of men in high stations, or the envy of those below them, the unreasonable violence which occasions quarrels and divisions, the immoderate keenness in the pursuit of things temporal, and the remissness in seeking after things eternal ; he could not fail to be persuaded, that the direction in our text, though heard with some kind of reverence, is far from being devoutly, or commonly obeyed.

In my discourse to you therefore at this time I propose to explain the nature and design of religious retirement and recollection, and to endeavour to persuade you to the practice of those duties.

I address myself to every one in this house ; but I consider the subject as more especially suited to those who have so immediate a prospect of commemorating the death of Christ in the sacrament ; for surely

it is particularly fit that our hearts should be purified by meditation and prayer, when we are in so solemn and public a manner to profess ourselves the disciples of Jesus. I propose then in the first place to explain the nature and design of religious retirement and recollection. When the illustrious writer of this psalm, who had such a deep insight into the diseases of the human heart, and could so ably prescribe salutary remedies, here recommends religious retirement and recollection, it seems evident that he has no design to say any thing in commendation of a total seclusion from the world. The words by no means import any thing of this nature. A recess from the world and its cares can never be the object of a general precept. In conformity then to the intention of the text, I am to consider that kind of retirement which is proper for men engaged in the business of life, and which is necessary, in order to support the social character usefully and honourably. Whether a total seclusion from the world, a resignation of all the

endearing ties of friendship, affection, love, a departure from all the duties which our present state requires, and of which providence seems to allot every one a share, be agreeable to the commands of God, or deserving praise of men, or a fit preparation for a state of happiness in the heavenly kingdom, where there is a society united by the strongest bonds, I will not at this time inquire. If they are ever allowable, the circumstances which call to them are very peculiar ; and I cannot hesitate to say that the most worthy of all characters is the man who maintains his station in life, ever animated by a fervent piety, and ever guided by an inviolable integrity. To cherish a spirit of piety, and to assist him in supporting an uniform uprightness of intention and action, religious retirement and recollection will be of the greatest importance. We will discern this if we consider in what the exercise of them consists.

It consists in devoting a portion of our time for the most valuable purposes, for

converſing with our own hearts, for the conſideration of our behaviour, and comparing it with the perfections of God; for inquiring after and applying the means of regulating every unlawful deſire, and of moderating every unreaſonable wiſh. In religious retirement, we are employed in pouring out our hearts before the giver of our life and our mercies, in imploring his aſſiſtance to improve our characters, in admiring and adoring the perfections of his nature; and in expanding the powers of our minds to receive his moſt gracious influences. The diſpoſitions chiefly to be exerciſed in the hours of retirement are, ſincerity in the conſideration of our own characters; impartiality in the examination of our lives; a devotion of heart kindled by the contemplation of unerring wiſdom, undeviating goodneſs and unlimited mercy; eſpecially as theſe are diſcovered in our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; humility of mind, and contrition of heart, ſo unavoidable when we are reviewing our own faults, and adoring the all-perfect God. The exact portion

of time that should be devoted to religious retirement and reflection, or how often the seasons for these exercises ought to recur, cannot be precisely determined, as the circumstances of mankind differ so widely. But surely there is no occupation of life which does not admit of some intervals. And shall christians be less zealous about the interests of virtue and religion than the philosopher who enjoined his followers every night, before sleep sealed their eyes, to call themselves to an account for the actions of the past day. Besides this, by professing our belief in the oracles of God, we look upon one day in seven as particularly dedicated to religion. And by the views many of you have, and your attendance here, you profess a degree of reverence for other seasons set apart for this purpose. To the busiest of us, I will venture to say, neither time nor opportunities for retirement and reflection are wanting. To excite you to lay hold on these, I now proceed to propose some arguments, which I shall endeavour to lay be-

fore you in such a manner, that they may not only serve as motives to engage compliance with the psalmist's advice, but likewise, that they may convey to the attentive hearer some farther instruction, as to the method in which we may most advantageously spend the hours of retirement.

May God grant to you the hearing ear, and the understanding heart; and to the preacher, the power of persuasion !

In the first place then, Religious retirement and reflection have a very direct tendency to reclaim and restrain from vice, and to improve in virtue. Man is compounded of several distinct powers and faculties, all necessary for human life and happiness, provided there is that regular subordination preserved among them, which nature points out, and without which, experience shews, that neither the individual, nor society can subsist. It is evident from our very frame, that God has conferred an authority upon reason and conscience. In the

narrow empire of the human mind these claim a right to sway the scepter. But who knows not, that man is apt to be misled by the influence of his passions, that are ready to act as rebellious subjects against the justest and the best of sovereigns? To break the bands of reason, and to obey the lawless dictates of irregular passion, the tumult of life, the suggestions of the gay, and the example of the vicious, prove like so many evil counselors. They are the movers of sedition: and their chief way of moving it is not by offering arguments, but partly by hurrying us away with the stream, and partly by raising such an uproar around us, that the voice of reason, which may be compared to the still, small voice of God, which spoke to Elijah, is considered as a whisper, from which we turn away our ear, as if we heard it not. If conscience offers its threatening admonitions, the mixing more deeply in the circle of the dissipated, the busy, and worst of all, the debauched, proves an opiate for that time

to lull it asleep. And thus the wretched man proceeds, till, like the haughty king, who, having times without number trampled upon the divine laws of his nature, lost his understanding, and was suffered to partake of every grovelling and degrading pleasure. Is this declamation? Alas! it is fact. O thoughtless man, how often hast thou eagerly engaged in a second diversion to drive away the reflection, the painful reflection which the guilt contracted in a former occasioned! I see the cup in the drunkard's hand, and he greedily swallows the poison, in order to drown the remorse of his mind for last night's intemperance. The unwary youth, once initiated into sinful pleasure, unwilling now to hear the counsel of virtue, but unable to repress it, seeks for the witnesses and advisers of his transgressions, and from the laugh of levity, and the madness of impiety, he believes wisdom overcome, and acquires new spirits to rush upon his ruin. This day you begin to take undue advantages of your neighbour: you begin

without daring to resolve that you will persist. When you impose upon your secure brother, your tongue falters, and a small degree of attention, (but honesty is always unfuspicious) would discern the alterations in your countenance. But to become more expert, you herd with the more experienced in villainy, and never allow yourselves a moment to reflect, till you be a proficient in that worst of trades, in which at first you was a backward scholar. Thus hurrying from vanity to vanity, and from vice to vice, the wicked multiply acquaintance, and attach companions in iniquity, strangers, utter strangers all the while, to what it behoves them most to know, strangers to themselves. Ye sons of folly, fain would I introduce you to a new acquaintance, fain would I engage you to take pleasure in a new kind of conversation. Cultivate an acquaintance with your own hearts, and I will change your name, and with reason : listen to the improving language of your consciences. Though you should meet with rebukes,

prefer them to the flattering voice of those foes to your improvement, peace and happiness, which approach you under the insinuating, but false appearance of pleasure. For in the religious retreat, with every passion stilled, and every desire quieted, behold holy reason seated on her throne, and exerting her full power. Here you form just judgments of your own conduct, and of that of others, of the proper and lawful pursuits of life, and the means of attaining lawful ends. When, removed from the eye of the world, we converse with our own hearts, then every man is upon a level. The external marks of dignity are removed, power is suspended, and riches make no difference. These things which are so apt to intoxicate the human mind, being absent, the sins which we committed in the hurry of life are remembered, considered and lamented. Then is it that recollection executing the office of the prophet of old, can thus address the man in the most exalted station, *O King, let my counsel be acceptable to thee. Break off thy sins*

by righteousness, and thy iniquity by shewing mercy to the poor, if so be it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity. Let but the unjust judge review the sentence for which his injured brother complains of him; and will not the remorse this occasions prevent him from pronouncing a like one? Ye who spend the night in revelling and drunkenness, whom the morning sun (which the children of temperance rise to behold with rapture, and which enables them to pursue the various, honest occupations of life) just shines upon as you are finishing your debauch; tell me seriously if you are not persuaded, that you would curb your licentious appetites, and walk in the paths of sobriety, if you set apart but ten minutes of every day for reflection, meditation and prayer? Would ambition ravage the world, or engage men in projects for pulling down states, ruining families, or reducing to misery particular persons, if those who feel its impulses would often calmly consider the vanity, uncertainty and short duration of all temporal enjoyments?

If this were the case, would ambition be any other thing in the human breast, but an honest desire of obtaining the means of promoting public, or private happiness? Would avarice hoard by every infamous method, if due scope were given to meditation, in order to convince us of the worthlessness of those riches which often *make themselves wings*, of the folly of purchasing the accommodations of a pilgrimage at the risque of losing an everlasting citizenship? It is in retirement that objects lose the false glare with which passion colours them, and that our own characters appear in a just point of view. Man will no doubt be partial to himself. I allow that the vanity of individuals is great. I allow that the blindness of man with regard to his own vices is astonishing: but let any person, considering himself under the awful influence of God; and praying earnestly to him that he would open his eyes to make him discern his faults, but once seriously reflect upon his temper and practice, and I maintain that he will not

remain so vain, or so blind as he was before. Had David obeyed his own direction before Nathan came to him, he had not heard so apt an allegory without sparing the resolute but charitable application, *Thou art the man.* Whence proceeds it, but from want of serious consideration, that if I were to ask your characters at the most candid of your neighbours, and mark down what they told me, that I should present you with a list of several vices which you could readily apply to some of those with whom you converse every day; but before you discerned that they belonged to yourself, it would be necessary directly to inform you, ye are the men. The pharisee whom our Saviour describes in the parable was a stranger to his own proper character, because, though he seemed to be religiously employed, yet he had not sufficient impressions of the holiness of that Being *in whose sight the heavens are not pure*, because he turned his view to his good qualities, rather than his faults, and because he estimated his worth not from God's law, but from a comparison

with others. In one word, I really cannot discern a vice in human nature which levity does not foster : and I am not sensible that there is any one vice which reflection and consideration would not at first tend to restrain, and by degrees to cure. I said likewise, that recollection and religious retirement tended to improve us in every virtue. By proving remedies for vice, they effect this in a considerable degree, but they have still a more direct tendency.

Every one is sensible, that resolutions to be virtuous have great influence to form a virtuous character. But resolutions entered into in retirement, and upon reflection, are those to which we most steadily adhere in action. In retirement we can best collect and most deliberately resolve to apply the maxims which the knowledge of the world is calculated to teach. Then occur all those religious and moral considerations which prove the fences and guardians of virtue. Consideration discovers the many failings and errors of which we

have been guilty ; and thus it promotes charity towards others, the forgiveness of injuries, at the same time the strictest circumspcction over one's * * * * *

* * * * * commanding situation he surveys the beauties which the chearful spring or fruitful autumn spreads around him, feels the most pleasing emotions diffuse themselves over his whole frame ? While walking along the sounding shore, does agreeable amazement fill the soul at beholding these inanimated forms erected by the Almighty's hand, the towering precipices, the vast ocean, or the boundless canopy of heaven. If these things are so ; and that they are, let experience attest, how reasonable is it to believe that the religious mind contemplating the everlasting Nature, before whom the sun is darkness, the earth an atom, and who treadeth upon the stars, should feel an expansion of its powers inconceivably great ? and in this situation, will not he that delighteth to dwell in the upright and pure, *manifest*

himself as he does not to the world? more especially, when the soul is enraptured with surveying the miraculous scheme of redemption, admiring the infinite love of that Saviour, who, *though rich, yet became poor, though high, yet humbled himself*, and by a course of actions most grievous and painful, opened the gates of glory to his followers; when we view him suffering, dying, rising again, when, as Elifha beheld his master, we behold him taken up into the superior regions, and are ready to cry out, *My God, and my Father*, will he refuse that a double portion of his Spirit should rest upon us? When piety prompts such expressions as these, *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God*; Is it not reasonable to think that present experience should confirm this truth? *The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous; his ears are open to their cry.* I do not deny, my brethren, that much has been advanced about this doctrine of communion with God, with

more zeal than knowledge. The manner in which the Spirit operates, we have the best reason to conclude, is often concealed from us, and inexplicable by us. But speaking the words of truth and soberness, it appears quite reasonable to ascribe the greatest part of that peace, joy and elevation which the truly religious man feels in his retired and devout hours, to the secret, though not less immediate or powerful, operations of that Spirit.

Having shewn the usefulness and the pleasure of religious retirement; If I were not convinced that with mankind often, where more generous and noble arguments fail, pleas from necessity engage to action, I should scarcely urge, as an argument to comply with the advice in the text, the unavoidableness of suffering retirement often, of being often obliged to reflect by many of those accidents and afflictions, which are the lot of humanity.

The sun of prosperity has as yet shone upon you. But think ye, will he never be overclouded, or will he never withdraw his beams, by which means levity will be banished from your soul; and reflection, from which you fled as from an enemy, be forced upon you? Will that river on which you descend, and which terminates in the ocean of eternity, be always equally placid and serene? Are there no rapid streams where you will find the greatest difficulty to manage that small skiff in which you are conveyed? Are there no water-falls, many fathoms deep, where you will be in the utmost danger of being overwhelmed? Will no violent gusts, descending from between the hills, be ready to overset you? In that period of time, which is consumed in the voyage of human life, will there be no stormy days, nor dark nights? Will there be but three seasons in the year, and those of the gentlest kind, spring, summer and autumn? Or will never winter appear, surrounded with all his storms? Vain mortal! *Man*

that is born of a woman, is of a few days : they are full of trouble. Though you have as yet always attended the house of feasting and mirth, yet you know not what sorrow may remain behind. At the table of the former, I know reflection is seldom admitted as a guest, and men who frequent their house, rarely ever retire ; or when they do, they are taken up with the pleasures, or the business of to-morrow. They never consider their hearts, their lives, or their tempers. Even in the house of God, which they frequent for custom's sake, or perhaps to prevent their being alone, their affections and their desires are still with the world, ruminating upon the guilty pleasures that are past, or looking forward to joys of the like nature. You have said to yourselves then, perhaps in the pride of your hearts, *My house shall never be moved.* But I will make some suppositions, that are often verified in life, which may perhaps convince you of the necessity of reflecting in time. I will suppose that you yet retain the virtue of na-

tural affection, and that you have friends and children who are dear to you. God sees fit to send the rod of affliction, and to take them out of life. Attending upon their funeral, when every eye is ready to drop a tear, will you still allow thoughtlessness and inconsideration to possess your hearts? Perhaps you may here be able to boast of your superiority. But know, that by folly many have been *brought to a morsel of bread*, and by unforeseen accidents, this hath sometimes been the fate of those in whom the wisdom of this world has been remarkable. If you are sent then to the cheerless hut of miserable poverty, dependent perhaps upon the charity of those whom you formerly despised; will your former companions now visit you, to fill up every vacant and lonely hour? Upon the very street, they would pass you without seeming to know you. Though in the days of your plenty, they squandered profusely with you at the debauch or entertainment, yet they will now treat you, as reflection perhaps will in-

form you, you treated the beggar who was shivering at your door, while you was wallowing in plenty. Finally, I will suppose that those afflictions which befall many, pain, disquiet, sickness, shall befall you. And no matter whether you are rich or poor, for it will make very small difference. Can you then believe that the goblet, sparkling with wine or strong drink, is the banisher of care? Will your vicious companions sitting at your bedside, prevent a visit from these strangers, thoughtfulness and recollection? Then indeed, in any of these or the like circumstances in which you may be, they will lay hold on you, and you can neither banish them, nor fly from them. They might have come to your aid and support, like guardian angels: but now they come like an armed force to bind you, and deliver you up to the tormentors. Therefore, my brethren, consider the situation in which you are, the misfortunes to which you are liable, which will oblige you to think and reflect, even in spite of your-

selves ; be persuaded now to accustom yourselves to these, that you may meet recollection and retirement, when they are necessary, with peace and satisfaction. As you would wish to abstain from vice, to improve in virtue, to enjoy the pleasures of devotion, not to render sickness, or poverty, or death intolerable, comply now with the advice of the Psalmist, *Commune with your own hearts upon your bed, and be still.* Believe me, my brethren, by following this advice, you will live the more harmoniously in the same society and neighbourhood : you will love one another the better, be more willing to overlook each others frailties and faults. You will be the more faithful ministers, the more diligent teachers, the more upright merchants, the more honest artificers, the more affectionate parents, the more dutiful children. In a word, you will be the more perfect in all the relations and circumstances of life in which you may be placed.

S E R M O N X V .

L U K E vii. 36—48.

And one of the pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the pharisee which had bidden him, saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who, and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him : for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he sayeth, Master, say on.

There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most ? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet ; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss : but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint : but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

FROM many principles of the human constitution, it might easily be shewn, that there is no method of instruction so pleasing and powerful, as that which is derived from a just delineation of characters, and an affecting representation of facts. These take a ready and fast hold of the memory, and the conclusions to be drawn from them, being similar to what prudence teaches every man to draw in the ordinary conduct of life, are easily apprehended, and leave a lasting impression. The sentiment which has obtained such universal approbation, *I am a man, and I think nothing belonging to man foreign to me*, is deeply engraved upon every heart: and while the soundest abstract reasoning, or most wholesome general rules are disregarded, virtue scarce ever fails to insinuate itself, and to gain ground where it is recommended by those examples which discover the natural and amiable feelings of the heart. They attract our love. They operate on our sympathy. They convince us, that what was once practised, is still

practicable: and thus while they attach, they as it were transform the soul. On the other hand, the deformity of vice is best represented in a living object. It becomes more odious by being contrasted with virtue. Its pernicious effects are most obviously displayed, and the sentiments of approbation and abhorrence are mutually heightened by opposition. We can scarcely turn to any discourse of our Saviour's, which does not serve to illustrate these observations.

The passage I have now read represents to us, in the character of the pharisee, a proud, haughty and rigid temper, and discovers to us the dangerous nature of those vices, which may lurk in the breast of a man, and influence his conduct, who is at the same time ignorant of them. The sincere marks of sorrow and attachment exhibited by the humble penitent, work upon our compassion, and interest us for her recovery. The humane and generous conduct of the great Instructor of mankind,

soothes and revives her dejected spirit: and we partake of these pleasing emotions. The acceptance of her humility, repentance and love, dispels all those doubtful and solicitous thoughts, which the sting even of forsaken guilt would otherwise occasion, and diffuses that sacred serenity and joy over the human heart, which meet with the approbation of conscience and of heaven. Such sentiments as these, I believe, naturally present themselves to a religious mind, on reading this passage. On account of its perspicuity and plainness, it does not require a long commentary; a few remarks, however, will not be improper.

The pharisees were a sect of the Jews, who pretended to a peculiar sanctity and virtue. They valued themselves on a strict observance of the law, and an entire conformity to all its ceremonies. The merit they assumed to themselves on this account, expressed itself in a supercilious haughtiness of behaviour, and an avowed contempt of others. It is natural to imagine, as it in-

fact happened with the pharisees, that a religion which consisted so much in externals, should often be made a cloak to conceal the carnal purposes of the heart. One of this sect, whom we may reasonably believe to have had as much candour and charity as most of the order, invited our Saviour to his house; and agreeably to the usual condescension and courteousness of his behaviour, he readily accepted the invitation. The exclusive privilege which the pharisees claimed of being accounted holy, had introduced a distinction that could not fail to be attended with very pernicious effects. If a man was not admitted into their sect, if he did not conform to every trivial observance, if he filled an office which happened with them to be unpopular, or dishonourable; in one or all of these cases, he was regarded as a sinner. Thus men, who in the estimation of the strictest sect among them, went all under the same denomination, being unrestrained by any regard to character, readily fell into those vices, an abstinence from which

would not have altered their general reputation. Uninfluenced by the hope of honest praise, or the fear of deserved reproach, it was no wonder if the real vices, which an injurious and political distinction had chiefly occasioned, and from which the pharisees could boast they were free, seemed to justify the appellation which they gave them. Pride and prejudice had carried the antipathy against them so far, that to hold any communication with them, or to eat with them, was accounted a stain; and a good office performed to them was scarce reckoned one of the duties of humanity. Our Saviour, whose native virtue and unstained integrity rendered no mean compliance with the prejudices of the times necessary, and the overflowings of whose benevolence were, like the rays of the sun, diffused to all, never avoided their company, notwithstanding the offence it gave, and the contempt and malice it produced: but by the aptest admonitions, and the most merciful declarations, infused into their minds, the obliterated principles of

virtue ; and by inspiring them with the hopes of the divine favour, recovered them from despair and guilt, to penitence and reformation.

It happened that while our Saviour was at meat with the pharisee, a woman of the city who belonged to the class we have been speaking of, and who had probably been notorious for her vices, came into the house ; and having brought with her an alabaſter box of ointment, while our Saviour reclined on the bed, ſtood at his feet and wept. The grief of her heart, and the fervour of her affection made her tears flow in ſuch abundance, that ſhe waſhed his feet with them. She moreover wiped them with the hair of her head, and anointed them with the ointment. I will not enter into any curious inquiry who this penitent woman was, whether Mary the ſiſter of Lazarus, Mary Magdalen, or ſome other ; or whether the hiſtory before us relates to the ſame event which is recorded by the other evangelists, as happening immediately be-

fore our Saviour was betrayed. It is sufficient to say, that the first is a point of mere curiosity, which it is neither easy nor necessary to determine, and that the relation we are considering, differs so much from those of the other evangelists referred to, both in order of time, and a variety of circumstances, that it appears extremely probable to me that they are not founded on the same transaction. It may be proper to make some remarks upon the signs of penitence and attachment which are here described.

There are some expressions of our passions natural and universal. There are other indications of them, which may be ultimately founded in nature, but immediately derived from the particular manners and customs that prevail in a country. Accidental circumstances too, in the former part of one's life, may give an additional and peculiar expression to some tokens of sorrow. Thus the effusion of tears is the natural and universal indication of grief,

the genuine expression of a soul melted with sorrow and penitence. The washing the feet of a stranger was an antient mark of hospitality, as we may see from Abraham's address to the angels, whom he invited to come into his tent. The custom spread over the east, and prevailed also among the antient Greeks. It had been retained by the Jews, and might naturally come to be considered as a token of regard, which is a sentiment so nearly allied to hospitality. I might here therefore remark that, when our Saviour washed his disciples feet, it was an instance both of condescension and regard, very suitable to the manners of the country. A salutation, in almost all ages and nations, has been considered as a token of good-will and friendship. And this very circumstance adds an infamy to the treachery of Judas, and a severity to our Saviour's question, *Betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?*

The hair of her head, which this penitent had probably been so careful to braid and

attire, in order to set off her beauty to the greatest advantage, to gratify her vanity, or seduce the unwary, now hangs loose, unadorned and dishevelled. She uses it to wipe the feet which her tears had bathed. The contrast of her former life and manners renders the negligence of her dress, and the instance of her humility more striking testimonies of the sincerity of her sorrow, and the purity of her purposes.

Ointments and perfumes were used in those days by way of ornament and neatness, and were often offered at entertainments to the guests. The practice of using them gave occasion to our Saviour to exhort his disciples, when they fasted, not to disfigure their faces as the Pharisees did, but to wash them, and anoint their head. What had formerly served for the decoration of her person, the penitent now employs to anoint our Saviour's feet.

The compassionate Jesus saw and received these natural, genuine and striking

tokens of remorse, repentance, and regard with complacence. But on this the disposition of the pharisee immediately appears, *for he said within himself, If this man were a prophet, he would have known who, and what manner of woman this is; for she is a sinner.* The vices which this remark discovers, I shall have occasion to mention more particularly afterwards. At present I only explain the history. Our Saviour, who judged not by the seeing of the eye, nor the hearing of the ear, but who discerned the secret sentiments of the heart, that he might obviate the objection, which was evidently the result of pride and self-confidence, makes use of a short, but apposite story. *There was a certain creditor which had two debtors, &c.*^a Simon, who perhaps did not know that the question had any relation to his own suspicions, answers according to the natural and first feelings of his heart. *Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most*^b. In the 44th, 45th, 46th,

^a Ver. 41, 42.^b Ver. 43.

and 47th verses, our Saviour applies the conversation to Simon and the penitent; the whole is to be taken together, and the meaning appears to me to be this, that as the generosity of a creditor, in the judgment of the pharisee himself, is the more to be praised the larger the debt he remits, so the mercy of God is the more to be admired in the pardon and acceptance of a notorious sinner: and as the gratitude of a debtor rises the higher, and is on this account more the object of our approbation, the greater the sum that is remitted him, so the gratitude and love which the remission of many sins kindle in a true penitent, are so strong and fervent, that the condescending Father of goodness regards them with a particular degree of approbation.

The opposition between the conduct of the pharisee and the woman sets both in the strongest light. I would only add, to what I have already observed, upon the circumstances that occur here, that the

customs of giving water to wash the feet of their guests, of salutation and presenting them with ointments, which had formerly been marks of general respect and hospitality, had, by the spirit of party and the mutual hatred of sects, been converted into tokens of more particular friendship and connection. The conduct of the pharisee to our Saviour at this time, which is tacitly blamed, renders this probable. The same also appears from our Saviour's observation in his sermon on the mount. *And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans the same^c?*

After these observations, let us now attend to those reflections which this passage suggests to us. Let us, in the first place, consider the character of the pharisee, whose vices are not expressly mentioned, but are left to be collected from the general strain of the history. There is no reason to think that he was among the most corrupt of that sect. We may

suppose that he was no stranger to those virtues which the pharisee claims in the xviiiith chapter of Luke, and that he was unstained by those vices, from which he glories in being free. He might have thanked God that he was neither *an extortioner, nor unjust, nor an adulterer, that he fasted twice in the week, and gave tithes of all that he had.* Fraud and oppression he had never countenanced; and we may allow that the ordinary uprightness of his behaviour was irreproachable. Ye men of the world, would ye desire a better character, or wish for a more blameless reputation? Strangers to the lovely and alluring form of virtue, you mistake for it a lifeless image which only bears a resemblance in a few features. From the history now before us, let us examine this character more minutely, and point out its defects.

First, The unjust suspicion which the pharisee's heart suggested, at seeing our Saviour receive the kindness of the peni-

tent, without shewing any marks of displeasure, evidently discovers a high degree of pride and self-confidence. The whole history also shews that he had no sense of his own imperfection, nor the least apprehension of his own demerit. There is not a vice more unbecoming human nature, considering its frailty and imperfection, than an overweening opinion of ourselves: as if we were exempted from follies and faults. When it is observed in the ordinary transactions of life, it is a proof of great weakness. But in the concerns of virtue and religion, it plainly discovers that we have no just and elevated sentiments of the standard of virtue; that we think of the supreme Being, the source and center of all perfection, in a manner that is unworthy of his purity and holiness, and that the culture and improvement of our own hearts and temper are the least object of our attention. With respect to our fellow-creatures, this temper has the worst effect. It gradually weakens and confines our virtue, and at last almost destroys the senti-

ments of humanity, kindness, generosity and compassion. If it should not happen entirely to corrupt and deprave the heart, it at least deadens all the best and most amiable affections of our nature, and prevents the exercise of every great and exalted virtue. Will the man who has indulged and cherished his pride, till it has become the prevailing and ruling passion of his heart, and blinded him to every frailty and fault in himself, be ready to forgive injuries? Will he return good for evil? Will he be patient under afflictions? Will he bear opposition? Will he spare the wretch that has incurred his resentment, and lies at his mercy? Will he shed the soothing tear of pity, or speak the words of kindness to quiet the distress of a troubled heart? Will he bind up the wounds of his poor inferior, and pour wine and oil into them to heal them? Ah no! Triumphant in the virtues, at whose defects the heaven-born soul would blush; and glorying in his being free from flagrant vices, he despises his fellow-servant, and even approaches heaven

with an assured countenance, and says to the humble and fearful, but devout worshipper, *Stand by, I am holier than thou.* This pride and self-confidence, by which man is most directly allied with the spirits who fell, is thus not only heinous in itself, but may properly be considered as a source of many other vices. Like a plentiful, but impure fountain, it emits a variety of streams equally turbid and impure. Being the quality most remarkable in the pharisaical character, the indignation which our mild and charitable Saviour expresses against this sect, may shew its enormity. By assuming an appearance of a conscious superiority, of a high regard for virtue, of a detestation of the abandoned, it screens itself from the censure of the world, and not rarely from the knowledge of the very man who is a prey to it. Thus being a foe equally powerful, secret and pernicious, its attacks cannot be too cautiously nor diligently guarded against. And the declarations in the gospel, that are so frequently repeated against this vice, are a most awful and alarming warning to christians to at-

tend particularly to their characters, and not to rest satisfied, as men are but too apt to do, if their consciences reproach them with no positive guilt.

2dly, I have the longer insisted upon this vice, because I consider it as the source from which others discovered to us in this history do flow. And as they are capable of being distinguished from it, let us particularly attend to them. It appears then, in the second place, that he was either devoid of the virtue of humanity and compassion, or that the vice which has been already named had so overpowered him, that it prevented its exercise. When the penitent came into the house, she discovers the strongest and most evident symptoms of sorrow and distress. This language, which is the language of nature, never fails to rouse, and to interest the heart. And to be ignorant of it, or inattentive to it, is the surest sign of an unfeeling soul. Yet the sorrowful appearance, the tears and the humble conduct of the penitent, so far from

attracting the attention, and exciting the pity of the pharisee, only afford occasion for a captious and ungenerous reflection. Knowledge of the world, and the false appearances that are to be met with in it, may render a man cautious and discerning : but if it steals the heart against every tender and compassionate feeling for a real sufferer, tho' almost the most worthless of men, let my soul remain in ignorance. The woman here described was, it is true, a sinner. But did the most unfeigned and expressive sorrow carry no plea for pity ? Rigid and unrelenting virtue, is this the lesson thou teachest thy votaries ? No. The virtuous heart is ever humane. At the sufferings of guilt it softens and melts, but with the tears of honest sorrow and penitence it mingles its own, and with the most attracting and endearing sympathy soothes their pains, and mitigates their anguish.

3dly, Another fault with which the pharisee is chargeable, is this : It appears that he must have entertained very low

and groveling notions of the divine purity and perfection. He harbours not the least suspicion that his own worth is defective, or the least doubt that the divine favour may be withheld : he seems on the contrary to consider it as his due. What must this man think of that everlasting One *in whose sight the heavens are not clean, and who charges his angels with folly?* While he extravagantly exalts his own merit, how must he have debased the Father of lights, whom the cherubim cannot behold without vailing their faces? Could his divinity be really the powerful, the jealous, the merciful, the glorious God of Moses and the prophets? or was he not rather the imperfect, the weak, the partial being of his own imagination? Think not, my brethren, that in this his understanding was merely defective. Just opinions of the Deity scarce ever fail, especially where revelation is vouchsafed, to arise in the mind that is disciplined by virtue, and governed by good affections. The proud and the vicious, on the con-

trary, are shut out by their own folly from the knowledge of God, and have no discernment of the Most High. *The Lord hateth a proud look, but he giveth grace unto the lowly*^d. Thus an attention to the character of the pharisee shews us, that he was ruled by pride, and a confidence in his own merit; vices most unbecoming the nature and condition of man: that his heart was insensible to the language of sorrow, and estranged from the feelings of humanity, and that his conceptions of the supreme Being were altogether unsuitable, and unworthy of his nature.

Let us now attend to a very different character, I mean that of the penitent woman. Her humility and penitence render her the object both of our regard and instruction. This woman, who had been a sinner, bought an alabaster box of ointment, and while our Saviour was at meat, stood behind him weeping, and began to

^d Prov. vi. 16, 17. iii, 34.

wash his feet with her tears, and to wipe them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. These indications of her love and attachment, her humility and purposes of amendment found such acceptance with our Saviour, that he said unto her, *Thy sins are forgiven thee.*

Fain would man hope, even without revelation, that the tears and cries of a returning sinner would bend the justice of the divinity, and incline him to mercy. Fain would nature lead us to ascribe a relenting temper to the Governor of the universe, like to that humanity, pity and compassion which we discover in man. But the trembling pinion of reason fails, when she soars to such sublime heights : and the report she brings is various, uncertain and confused. After the longest deliberation, the most sensible and most natural prayer which a man suspended between hope and fear would offer to his Maker upon this subject, would be some such one as this. “ O

“ thou Sovereign of the universe, pour thy
“ consolation into a heart that is racked
“ with doubts and disquiets, and dares
“ neither distrust thy mercy, nor rely on
“ thy favour.” It is revelation that properly describes the nature, and assures us of the efficacy of true repentance. These important and consolatory doctrines are displayed to us in the instance we are now considering.

S E R M O N X V I .

M A T T H E W x x v i . 36——44.

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith to his disciples, sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful, and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh to the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter

not into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again : for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

THOUGH it be universally acknowledged, that the example of Christ is intended for the imitation of Christians, yet we seldom take sufficient pains to delineate the several virtues of his life, and to impress our own hearts with a sense of their dignity and importance. The solemn institutions of religion, however, have a direct tendency to bring these objects to our view ; and the insisting on them, when we meet for public worship, must probably have the advantage of falling in with the natural current of our feelings and sentiments.

The knowledge of the characters of those persons whom history represents to us, is chiefly derived from observing the manner in which they acted in the capital and most interesting scenes of life. In these the leading qualities of the mind concentrate, and exert themselves; and they are marked so distinctly, and represented, as it were, so luminously, that we can ascertain them with precision. But of all the circumstances in which man can be placed, that of calamity and affliction proves most directly the vigour and the dispositions of his mind; and such as this situation discovers him to be, such he generally is.

The passage of scripture which I have now read, represents our Saviour overwhelmed with such a load of sorrow and suffering, and overpowered with such a variety of melancholy prospects, that supposing the truth of his history, even his enemies cannot fail to believe, that upon this occasion, the natural and the genuine

feelings of his mind must have broke forth, and that now, when all art must have been disconcerted, he truly appeared what he actually was. Every word therefore which he speaks, and every emotion he discovers, strongly indicates the nature of his character, and, as it were, sets the seal to it. The former transactions of his life must be tried by this touchstone ; and in every instance wherein they correspond to what he spoke and acted in these critical moments, we must consider them as the exhibitions of an uniform and consistent character. But before we enter on this view of our subject, let us attend to the preceding part of the evangelist's narration, and to the facts that are here represented to us.

As the time of our Saviour's suffering drew near, he gave more direct intimations of it to his followers, and pointed out the very person who was to betray him into the hands of sinners. After the institution of his supper, he had departed

with his disciples to the Mount of Olives, where he again declares to them his own impending sufferings, the general consternation in which they should be involved, and their desertion that was to ensue. After this, our text informs us, that he went to Gethsemane, and his particular attachment and affection engaging him to make choice of some of the disciples for companions in that mournful hour which was to follow, he accordingly selected Peter, and James, and John, and retired with them to a small distance. To them he opened the calamitous and distressed state of his mind, in that plain and unaffected language which is so natural to distress. *My soul, says he, is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.* And while he knew that it was appointed for him to *tread the winepress alone, and that of the people there should be none with him*^a, yet the infirmity of nature so far operated as to make him hope for some assistance from the presence and sympathy of his

^a Isaiah lxiii. 3.

friends. He therefore entreats them to tarry, and to watch with him. Then he went a little farther, and in the bitterness of his soul, he fell on his face and implored his Father's aid, in these words equally expressive of his piety and his resignation, his sufferings and his fortitude. *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.* Upon returning to his disciples, he finds them asleep; and addressing himself to Peter, who, but a little before, had so confidently promised upon the fidelity and steadiness of his service. *What, says he, could not ye watch with me one hour?* At the same time he gives a gracious admonition against any future defection, and points out the means of avoiding it, *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:* and with the same mildness and benignity which ever distinguished his character, he commends their affection, and palliates their error. *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* In the utmost agony of mind which

forced the sweat through every pore like great drops of blood, as Luke informs us, he reiterates the same fervent and resigned prayer, and again finding the disciples asleep, he retires the third time, and prays to his Father, using the same words.

From what causes this sorrow proceeded, which our Redeemer felt, is not precisely said. But the whole history shews us that it was extreme and overwhelming. It certainly consisted chiefly in those views which arise from a dark and depressed state of mind, and which the soul that feels, knows to be more poignant than all the tortures that can be inflicted on the body. The future calamities of a city whose overthrow he frequently laments in such pathetic terms, the wretched state of a perishing world, the inconsiderable effects his divine instructions had hitherto produced, the falseness of a pretended friend, the infirmity of a few select disciples ; all perhaps wrought upon his compassionate

heart, and filled him with inexpressible anguish. The foresight of sufferings which humanity shrinks from, of pangs which an imagination full of sensibility clothes with more terror than the actual sufferings inflict, was perhaps too powerful to be borne in that situation in which these ideas presented themselves. Add to all these, the consciousness that those divine aids on which he had always depended, and which had been so liberally communicated, were now for a season withdrawn ; and that alone and unsupported, he felt himself left to struggle with all the bitterness of death ; I say, let us attend to these things, and perhaps we may have some conception of that dismal state, in which our Saviour uttered this prayer. *Father, if it be possible, let this cup depart from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt ;* upon which, as Luke informs us, an interposition of providence became necessary, and an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him. It is sufficient to mention, for it would be superfluous

to prove, that by the first expression, *Father, if it be possible*, is meant, not if the request I now make is within the verge of Omnipotence, but if it is consistent with the plan of the divine government, and the great design of my mission into the world. That severe depression of mind which he presently felt, and the sufferings he was so soon to undergo, are evidently what he meant by that cup which he prays to be removed from him. The lot of human life in general may be figuratively expressed by a cup ; and the figure is so frequent in scripture, and so apposite indeed of itself, that it must be readily apprehended. Thus the psalmist, to denote the felicity of his situation, uses the expression, *My cup runneth over*^b. And our Saviour, when he rebukes the sons of Zebedee for their intemperate request, does it in these terms, *Are ye able to drink of the cup which I shall drink of*^c ? That is, to partake of the sufferings which I must endure.

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^b Psalm xxiii. 5.^c Matthew xx. 22.

Having said thus much in explication of the passage now under consideration, I proceed to my principal design in this discourse, to wit, to consider those virtues in the character of Christ which are here exhibited to us, and to illustrate them from the corresponding passages of his life. That I may not engage in too wide a field, I shall confine myself to the consideration of those features of our Saviour's character which appear in this passage in the most conspicuous light ; I mean his piety, his resignation, and his fortitude : And of these I shall discourse in the order I have now mentioned them.

1st, The piety of our Saviour's heart is here discovered in the strongest light. The immediate recourse he has to prayer in this distressful situation, the humble prostration he used, the fervour of his address, and the tenor of it, all conspire to shew that he was actuated by the truest sense of the divine perfections, and the veneration that is due to them. And indeed, if we can be said

to perceive the principal qualities of a person's character, who gave a perfect pattern of so many virtues, we may pronounce them to be, a perpetual impresson of the divine perfections and government, and a humane and generous feeling for the distresses of mankind. The first discovers itself by all the expressions of veneration and zeal which the different circumstances of his life gave occasion to, and in the frequent acts of a rational and elevated devotion. All the answers which he gave at that time, when he was led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, are plainly characteristical of this disposition. When the tempter desired a proof of his being the Son of God, by commanding the stones to become bread, he replies ; *It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*^d. Upon a second effort to seduce him, by a quotation from scripture, he both shews his own piety, and insinuates a reprehension

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^d Matthew iv. 4.

of the malicious employment of this wicked spirit. *It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God^e.* The last answer he gives discovers entirely the same temper. *Thou shalt worship, says he, the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve^f.* In his sermon on the mount, which contains the sum of christian morals, there is this remarkable difference from every other system, that the duty of piety is not only recommended as an essential branch of morality, but that every other duty is insisted upon as flowing from or dependent upon it; and that in the performance of every one of them, we are called to consider ourselves as creatures related to the supreme Being, answerable to him for our conduct, and under the strictest obligation to promote his glory. The divine prayer which he taught his disciples is a perfect model of devout expression. It is impossible to read it with attention without perceiving that it breathes the sentiments of a heart under this particular impression, that the happiness of human

^e Matth. iv. 10.

^f Matth. iv. 7.

creatures arises principally from the advancement and completion of the divine counsels. When his disciples had taken some offence at seeing him converse with the Samaritan woman ; from a small incident which soon followed, he lays hold of an opportunity both of rectifying their mistakes, and of informing them of the great object he had in view. When they *prayed him, saying, Master, eat. I have meat*, says he, *to eat that ye know not of. For my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work* §. As by the appointment of providence, food is necessary for invigorating our bodies, and for enabling us to perform the duties of ordinary life ; so the exertions of piety, and the spreading its interests, seemed essential not only to the felicity, but also to the existence of the Son of God.

There is another very affecting passage in the life of Christ, which evinces in a

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§ John iv. 27—35.

striking manner the reality, the extent and the force of this principle of piety. While he was talking to the people, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Being informed of this, he answered, and said to him that told him, *Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hands to his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever doth the will of my heavenly Father, the same is my brother and sister and mother*^h. And to the same purpose, when a certain woman, struck with the divinity of his discourses, cries out, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck*, he answers, *Yea rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and do it*ⁱ. Even those relations which generally form the closest union, and which, as appears from several incidents in our Saviour's life, he was far from overlooking, were still inferior to the connection formed by the prevalence of virtuous and devout dispositions. It is remarkable too,

^h Matth. xxii. 46. ⁱ Luke xi. 27, 28.

that when any emotion of his heart is excited, it naturally mingles and associates with that prevailing spirit of piety, which seems still to have been predominant.

Upon one occasion, when he saw the multitudes, we are told, *he was moved with compassion towards them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he to his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest*^k. The asperity with which he rebukes the scribes and pharisees, appears to have proceeded from the same principle. They were not only guilty of gross immoralities, but they practised them under the cloak of religion ; and it was this circumstance, which a pious mind must regard with indignation, that gave rise to all that severity of censure, which exceeds

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^k Matthew ix. 36, 37, 38.

the usual bounds of his mildness and moderation.

I might confirm the same truth, and shew the prevalence of the principle of piety in our Saviour's mind, from the strain of several of his parables, which are evidently intended to give men just ideas of the divine nature and government, to inculcate the importance of these truths, and to point out the estimation which the belief of them bestows on human characters. Our Saviour makes this application of the parable of the lost sheep, and the lost piece of silver. It is equally obvious in that of the prodigal son: and it is plain, that the principal circumstance which rendered the prayer of the publican more acceptable than that of the pharisee, arose from the just conceptions he entertained of the purity and perfection of the supreme Being,

I shall now consider, as an illustration of this subject, some of the particular acts of devotion which are recorded of our Saviour

in the history of the gospel. It is to be remembered, that there are but a few of our Saviour's sayings and actions committed to writing : for if they should all be mentioned, as the apostle John expresses himself, *I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*¹. But there is a sufficient number of facts for determining precisely his character ; and the acts of devotion that are transmitted to us fully prove the spirit by which he was actuated. The first prayer recorded by the evangelist Matthew, is that which he offers up after having lamented the inattention and hardheartedness of those cities, in which he had performed so many mighty works. *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*^m. Can words express more strongly a deep impression of the divine government, and an acquiescence

¹ John xxi. 25.^m Matthew xi. 25, 26.

accompanied with gratitude in all its determinations.

When our Saviour came to the tomb of Lazarus, we perceive by the answer which he gave Martha, that the glory of God was the principal object of his consideration, from the miracle he was about to perform. *Said I not to thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?* And when the stone was removed, he lift up his eyes and said, *Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always; but for their sakes I said it, who stand by, that they may believe that thou hast sent me*ⁿ. The exultation here expressed in the consciousness of the divine favour is evident; and when we consider, that a particular event which, in itself, could to our Saviour be nothing extraordinary, but which was so well adapted for impressing the spectators with a belief of his divine mission, the great mean of promoting the glory of God among mankind;

ⁿ John xi. 40, 41, 42.

when we consider, I say, that this event was the immediate object in view, we shall readily discern the propriety of the latter part of this prayer. The longest act of devotion that the scripture records of him, is that contained in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel. If there were no other, surely this would fully evince the warmth of his devotional feelings, his ardent zeal for his father's glory, and his supreme veneration of his perfections. The prayer contained in the passage which I have taken for the foundation of this discourse, was repeated no less than three times ; and it is put up with that earnestness, which touches the heart in such a manner as the longest comment upon it could not accomplish. The line betwixt agonizing sorrow and despondency of mind, is precisely marked ; and the reiteration of the same petition, though his Father did not see proper to grant his request, proves beyond contradiction, that no disappointment could shake the strength of that piety which had grown from his earliest years, and which

all the adversities of life had tended but to confirm. When we consider, in conjunction with all these, the regular and stated benedictions he used, when he was receiving the gifts of providence, or communicating them to others ; the unwearied activity he employed in fixing in the minds of human creatures a sense of the importance of religious principles ; those frequent retirements from the world for purposes of devotion, after one might have supposed that he was exhausted by the public ministrations of his office ; his spending whole nights in prayer, and his rising often before day-break to the same employment : when we consider, I say, all these, they will certainly afford such proofs of the piety and the devotional spirit of the Son of God, as must tend strongly to affect the heart.

2dly, Let us attend to that resignation of mind which is exemplified in this passage of holy writ, and marked in many other incidents of our Saviour's life. Resignation arises so naturally from a spirit of

piety; and is so inseparably connected with it, that we may view it as the offspring of this respectable parent ; or perhaps we may rather consider them as kindred virtues, mutually borrowing from, and lending lustre to one another. Resignation supposes a state of life, in which there are various calamities and afflictions : and the greater mixture there is of these, the greater scope is given for the exercise of this virtue, which implies a calm and chearful submission to the will of God under the most adverse dispensations of his providence. As our Saviour was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*, and was exposed to a scene of suffering, that can in no respect be paralleled, there was the amplest scope for the exertion of this virtue : and accordingly no feature of his character is more plainly or distinctly discovered.

It is to be remarked that virtue in general is by no means ostentatious, and the more sincere and exalted the virtue is, the less it will affect to display itself to the

best advantage. The pedant is always in quest of an opportunity to shine by a multiplicity of words without knowledge, while the man of real abilities never discovers them in an improper manner. You all know that the shallow stream murmurs along, while the motion of the deep river is unheard and unobserved. A formal exhibition of any class of virtues in our Saviour's life, though more obvious, must have been less natural, less striking, and less effectual for all the purposes of human reformation. We are in general therefore left to collect them as they occurred in those various incidents which gave proper opportunities for exemplifying them. The first proof of his resignation arises from that silent and composed manner with which he bears the various ills of human life, equally remote from the insensibility of the stoic, and the pride of the cynic. When he had fasted so long, that the powers of nature must have been greatly depressed, and was afterwards exposed to a severe temptation, he utters no repining ex-

pression. It is incidentally and without the least complaint, when justice seemed to require it, that he paints so strongly the poverty and distress of his external circumstances. *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* While he travels through Judea working the will of his Father, we hear no complaint of the sultry sun by day, nor the unwholesome fogs by night, of the rough roads, or steep mountains, the rapid rivers, or dangerous lakes. In the execution of his office, though it was plain he was not insensible of those hardships he was called to undergo, yet we perceive no indication of peevishness or discontent. He uses no unbecoming shifts to avoid adversity, nor any unworthy means to court prosperity. On the other hand, he seems to consider all attention to every human accommodation beneath his notice, in as far as it would have taken up so much of that precious time which was solely devoted to the eternal interests of mankind. I appeal to those who

know the world, whether this general manner of life, joined to that perpetual sense of divine things that was upon his mind, does not prove a general resignation of temper with more force, and with less suspicion than a thousand declarations could have done. But the occurrences of our Saviour's life were so various, and some of them of such a particular nature, that in these the declarations of his resignation became perfectly natural and unsuspicious, and the exemplification of it altogether proper and conspicuous. There cannot be a more apposite instance to our present purpose than that which is exhibited in the text. Under the deepest agony of mind, and while he suffers a species of distress which he had never before felt in so great a degree, the powers of nature are ready to fail: he almost recoils from the hour for which he had come into the world: he falls on his face, and prays that the cup might pass from him: but though the conflict was terrible, and the prospect overwhelming, he immediately adds, *Nevertheless, not as I will,*

but as thou wilt, if this cup may not pass away except I drink it, thy will be done. My request is fervent; because my suffering is extreme; but my sense of resignation is still more powerful than my aversion to pain. Can language express what he felt; or describe the submission of his soul? Let humanity here drop a tear, and the heart formed for the admiration of suffering virtue revere his resignation.

A very short time after he exhibits another striking instance of the same temper. When the zeal of Peter induced him to draw his sword in his master's defence, and to smite the servant of the high-priest; he desires him to put his sword up again into its place, and in the strongest terms expresses his entire acquiescence in the sufferings destined for him by the counsels of the Almighty. *The cup, says he, that my Father has given me to drink, shall I not drink it?* The evangelist Matthew likewise records another saying of his upon this occasion, which equally proves the calm resignation

of his soul. *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But then how shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be^o?* The same spirit is also shewn in that severe reproof which our Saviour gave to Peter upon a former occasion. For when he foretold his sufferings, this disciple said to him, *Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.* But instead of approving an answer that in some measure discovered affection, he turned to him and said, *Get thee behind me, satan, thou art an offence unto me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* And to mention only one other particular instance which accompanied the last scene of his life: A little after having borne with incredible patience the tortures of his body and the anguish of his mind, he still preserved the union betwixt soul and body: and it was not till he perceived all the counsels of God accomplished that he cried out, *It is finish-*

^o Matth. xxvii. 53, 54. ^p Matth. xvi. 22, 23.

ed., and then bowed his head and resigned his soul into the hands of that God to whom he had commended it.

3dly, Let us consider the fortitude which our Saviour always discovered under the pressure of the severest afflictions. Fortitude is so much allied to resignation, that though perhaps we sometimes observe the latter in people of a soft and tender cast, who cannot properly be said to possess the former; yet the triumph and perfection of resignation always supposes an unshaken fortitude and intrepidity of mind. Accordingly all the illustrations I have used upon the former topic of discourse might with propriety be produced as proofs of the fortitude of our Saviour's mind. The coincidence of the sentiments of fortitude and resignation, with respect to his character, appears the more unquestionable from this consideration, that he was able to have avoided the sufferings he endured by an exertion of that intrinsic power which was permanent in him; and that the sole

cause of his suffering the greatest load of calamities which ever fell to the lot of one man, arose from his own native superiority of mind, and his unlimited submission to his Father's will. Thus he tells us himself. *No man taketh my life from me ; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again*⁹ : and he who could have obtained *more than twelve legions of angels from his father*, was able to have struck dead with a word that armed, lawless multitude which came out of Jerusalem to apprehend him. The endurance therefore of calamities proves a degree of fortitude in our Saviour's mind, in some measure dissimilar, and in every respect superior to that which was ever exhibited by any other person. And from what has now been remarked, it will appear how plain an example of this virtue is discovered to us in the history now before us. Fortitude by no means implies an insensibility to the evils which befall us : on the other hand, wherever this insensibility takes

⁹ John x. 18.

place, the exercise of fortitude must be entirely excluded. It is no less indisputable that the greater share of sensibility we possess, the greater merit arises from a conduct decent and proper under distress and affliction. Now it appears to me, that this passage equally shews the sensibility of our Saviour's mind, the height of his distress, and his resolution of enduring the utmost extremity, rather than counteract the ends, or diminish the dignity of his obedience.

I shall but just mention two or three other instances which shew in a striking light the virtue now under our consideration. Fortitude not only discovers itself in the actual bearing of afflictions, but in the general turn of our behaviour to those who possess power and superior influence, and in whose hands are the means of inflicting punishments, and taking vengeance for supposed injuries. In this view the manner of our Saviour's behaviour to the scribes and pharisees, who were the most powerful and popular leaders of their time, and

whose principal object was evidently the preservation of their power, strongly indicates this disposition. Instead of soliciting their favour by direct praises, or even by dubious silence; there is no set of men, against whom he uses the severity of censure with equal keenness. Every reader tolerably acquainted with the history of the gospel will perceive the justice of this remark. I shall only appeal to the twelfth and twenty-third chapters of Matthew's gospel, and the corresponding places in the other evangelists. In the same light we must consider that severe reply which our Saviour gives to the pharisees, when certain of them came to him, and said, *Get thee out and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee.* Instead of a soothing or an evasive answer, which, considering the power and disposition of Herod, could not perhaps have been censured, *Go ye,* says he, *and tell that fox, behold I cast out devils to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected*^r.

^r Luke xiii. 31, 32.

But there is nothing can set this virtue of our Saviour in a stronger point of view than his behaviour when the multitude, led on by Judas, came out armed with swords and staves, and at a time of darkness too, which, as it is most suited to the purposes of malice and cruelty, is also most apt to raise timidity, for they had brought with them, as the evangelist John expressly mentions, lanterns and torches. His conduct upon this occasion is throughout so noble and magnanimous, that I am sensible all words are unequal to my conceptions of its greatness. When Judas approached and said, *Hail master, and kissed him*, he calmly replies, *Friend, wherefore art thou come?* It was no wonder that all the effrontery of guilt was silenced by the sedate majesty and meekness of divine virtue. Accordingly we read of no answer made by his revolted disciple at that period, tho' as his beloved disciple tells us, *he knew all things that should come upon him, yet he stepped forth to the multitude, and said, Whom seek ye?* When they re-

plied, *Jesus of Nazareth*. He answers, *I am he*. As soon as he had said, *I am he*, says John, *the multitude went backward, and fell to the ground*. The intrepidity of his reply appeared so astonishing, that the hearts of the cruel and merciless were almost changed: and had he been anxious to save his life, no miracle would have been necessary to have diverted their purpose. Then he asks them again, *Whom seek ye?* And when they said, *Jesus of Nazareth*, he answered, *I have told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way*^s. The brave are ever merciful and compassionate. And while Jesus himself meets suffering with a daring and unshaken mind, he discovers the most amiable attention to his followers, and that too in circumstances in which even a great mind might have been properly engrossed with its own concerns. It truly appears to me, that the mere superiority and intrepidity of our Saviour's conduct would have naturally produced such an effect upon the multitude, as to have sent them

^s John xviii. 4—6.

away without accomplishing their purpose, had it not been for the zealous interposition of Peter, which gave them time to recover from their surprize, perhaps inflamed them anew, and bestowed sufficient courage to lead the unresisting Jesus away. This discourse would admit of much practical improvement, if I had time to enlarge upon it. But I shall contract what I have to say into as narrow a compass as possible.

In the first place, my brethren, *what think ye of Christ?* Do not the exalted virtues which he practised, show that he is the Son of the living God? Behold the admired wish of the heathen fulfilled: Virtue itself assuming a human shape, and dwelling among men. This is the divinity set up in our temples. To him bow your knees, and to him offer your hearts.

2dly, From this particular delineation of some of the virtues which were so conspicuous in the life of Christ, let us learn

not only a general admiration of these virtues, but let us aspire after the practice of them in the similar instances of life and conduct in which the providence of God may place us. The respect we pay to the qualities of the divine life, is by far of too general a nature. We too rarely descend to particulars. Who is the man that profits most by this discourse? He who goes away, applauding a devout temper? Or he who forms the resolution of becoming more devout, and puts his resolutions into practice? The latter alone is the profitable hearer.

S E R M O N XVII.

J O H N xix. 30.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

AMong the infinitely various characters of men, there are a few who are attentive to whatever seems to be serious and important; there are many to whose reason we speak in vain, if we cannot interest their hearts; there are some of so soft a mold, that whatever has the least degree of tenderness melts and affects them, while others can see and hear what is quite overpowering to such, and still remain unmoved. When we view men in a particular light, the variety of their characters, propensities, inclinations, and capacities is amazing. When we survey them in a different point of view, their resemblance is as evident and striking. Their resem-

blance consists in their original powers and principles; their difference arises from situation, education, improvement, and a great number both of known and latent causes. From their variety it happens, that different objects affect different men; from their resemblance it happens that some things affect almost all men, though in different degrees.

The general propensity of mankind to observe and regard the last words even of those who have been no way remarkable in life, cannot fail to be acknowledged; but this propensity particularly appears with regard to those who have acted a conspicuous part, or who are considered by us as our friends and benefactors. The last words of such impress the minds of most men in the strongest manner, and there is scarcely one on whom they do not produce some effect. The words themselves, the occasion on which they are spoken, the circumstances with which they are attended, the consequences which follow, naturally

excite such a variety of emotions, that supposing a person to remain untouched by some of them, yet he feels the force of others. The verse now read, which contains the last words of our Saviour, affords a variety of reflections, which must prove interesting to every hearer. In treating of them I propose, in the first place, to consider the meaning and import of this expression, *It is finished*, which our Saviour used before he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. 2dly, I shall consider the peculiar light in which this expression, with the consequence which immediately followed, discovers our Saviour's character to us.

In the first place: By this expression, *It is finished*, we may understand our Saviour as declaring that the great plan of divine providence, for which he was sent into the world, was accomplished.

Those who live in the world propose to themselves various ends; and we unavoidably consider those ends, as objects either

of praise, or of disapprobation. One aims at the gratification of his appetites, and the enjoyment of his pleasures. Another pursues riches, or makes ambition, and the love of power, the guide of his life. We cannot view these men in the same light with those, who are fired with the love of virtue, of their country, of mankind. We term some ends, mean and unworthy, unworthy of a rational creature like man; others laudable and becoming; and some truly great and heroic. It is farther to be observed, that we not only applaud the prosecution of an end that is good, but if it be prosecuted with a peculiar degree of steadiness, the more justly and highly it obtains our approbation. It can scarcely be said of the worst, that they never pursued a good end; but how finished is that character, which never stooped to any end that was mean and unworthy! The eye of the generality of men is captivated by every glaring object. Objects of this kind sometimes even attract the heart, and divert the aim of the well-intentioned. We

can easily apply to human life the fable which represents one as obstructed in the prosecution of a race, by meeting with golden apples which were industriously thrown in the way. But amidst all the variety of possible pursuits, it will be acknowledged, that none can be accounted so truly great and heroic, or so deserving of our utmost steadiness, as promoting the glory of God, and fulfilling all the designs of his providence. That this was the end which our Saviour ever had in view; and that he pursued it with the most unwearied steadiness and attention, is evident to every one who reads the gospel.

A little after his entrance upon his public ministry, when his disciples asked him to take some meat, to support him under the fatigues which he had endured, he takes occasion to inform them, that *his meat was to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work*^a; and to the same purpose he declares in another place, *I came down from heaven not to do my own*

^a John iv. 34.

will, but the will of him that sent me^b. Anxious to fulfil the great plan of providence, he always discovers that it was uppermost in his thoughts. *I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work*^c. In that long prayer which he offers up to his Father a little before his crucifixion, recollecting what was already done, and conscious of his fortitude to endure the last trial, he declares, *I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do*^d. When the zeal of one of his disciples would have led him to oppose the unjust violence that was offered to his Master, he admonishes him not to resist the will of his Father. *The cup which my Father, says he, hath given me, shall I not drink it*^e? If we attend to the actions of Jesus, we must allow that they were calculated for promoting the ends of divine providence, as far as we can conceive any course of life to be so.

^b John vi. 38. ^c John ix. 4. ^d John xvii. 4.

^e John xviii. 11.

When we consider things in a very general view, it is true that every thing which happens may be said to constitute a part of the plan of divine providence. In this sense it is, *that the wrath of man praiseth God, and that he hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.* The natural course of things is nothing but certain dispositions of his appointment; and under the plan of his administration is comprehended both the conduct of the virtuous, and the behaviour of the vicious. This we may call the natural plan of his providence.

But when we attend to the moral perfections of the Almighty, the declarations he hath given in the constitution of man, that he is the friend and patron of virtue and of virtuous men, the evidences he affords of his desire to promote the kingdom of righteousness among men, we recognize another plan of a more particular nature, in which he seems to be more immediately interested. This we may call the mo-

ral plan of his providence. It is in this latter sense that the words now under consideration are to be understood. The most exalted piety, the most extensive benevolence, the greatest humility, the utmost meekness, patience, and resignation; Lo! these, and every other virtue shone forth with the greatest lustre through the whole of the character of Jesus. The uniform piety and purity of his conduct give an irrefragable evidence to every declaration that he made; and force us, if we will not believe himself, at least to believe him for his works' sake. It is proper to be remarked, that the scheme, or plan of providence, and the view of accomplishing it, were objects to the enlarged and comprehensive mind of the Son of God, in a degree and manner different from that in which they can be supposed to be objects to the wisest and most enlightened of his followers. The whole scheme was at once in his eye; the beginning, the progress, and the result of it were sensibly present to him. He discerned the connections and dependencies, and

that infinite series of events which it comprehends. He saw the particular end, which every action of his life, and every instance of his suffering promoted as precisely as one skilled in works of human art, can discern the particular tendency and purpose of every part of any piece of workmanship that is presented to him. Ever intent upon fulfilling that part which was allotted to him, just before he resigned his spirit, he cried out, *It is finished.* As it appears therefore, both from the conduct and declarations of our Saviour, that the promoting the glory of God, and the fulfilling the plan appointed by his providence, was his constant and invariable aim while he dwelt with mankind; it is extremely reasonable to conclude, that by the last words he uttered he intended to signify to the world, that this plan was now accomplished; that the intentions of divine providence, as far as they regarded his mission, his life, his sufferings, his death, had their completion. The general strain and tenor of the passage con-

firms what has now been advanced. *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scriptures might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar, and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost^f.* But though this is the most general sense in which we are to understand these words, and though we cannot assign any other that is not comprehended in the explication now given, yet they very rationally admit of a more particular and confined interpretation. Let us therefore consider the more particular parts of this great and extensive plan, which our Saviour might have had in view when he expressed himself in this manner.

I would observe then, in the second place, that we may consider these words

^f John xix. 28, 29, 30.

as a declaration from our Saviour, that his sufferings were now ended. As endued with the feelings of human nature, such a long and continued course of sufferings, such an uninterrupted series of the severest affliction, could not fail to affect his spirit in the most sensible manner. And the consciousness that now the measure of his sorrows was full, joined to the foresight of his speedy deliverance from them, made him cry out in these memorable words, *It is finished*. Those consolations, which even the indulgent Father of mercy had by an extraordinary dispensation of providence withdrawn from his own blameless Son, were now in some measure restored. He commends his spirit into his hands. He saw the concluding scene of that wretchedness to which he had voluntarily submitted, the bitter and the baleful cup of grief he had drained to the very dregs. Still his unshaken soul with astonishing patience bore every shock, and encountered every foe; and not all the extremity of pain and ignominy en-

gaged him to quit the body till he had experienced the last indignity which it was decreed for him to endure. But when he received the vinegar, he declared that all his sorrows were now accomplished, and by one voluntary effort he resigned that sacred spirit which had exhibited such miraculous instances of every human and divine virtue.

In the third place: We may consider these words as a declaration that the offences of men were now expiated, and that the justice of God was fully satisfied. This explication is perfectly agreeable to what has been advanced in the preceding part of this discourse; and in this light they have commonly been considered.

There is nothing more plainly asserted in scripture, than that Christ Jesus suffered in our room and stead, *the just for the unjust*; that he gave *his life a ransom for many*; that *we receive atonement by him*. Men who have considered the di-

vine perfections in a particular view, have raised many objections against this doctrine: but I know of no method by which we can become acquainted with the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being, but by a serious and humble attention to the works of God, to the usual method of administration, as it is discovered in the government of the world, and to the revelation which in his mercy he hath vouchsafed to dispense to mankind. If we attend to the method of God's government of the world, we meet with many instances where some are involved in punishment for the faults and crimes of others. The deliverance from calamities that were deserved, and ready to be executed, is often procured by the aid of others who bear a share of these calamities though they had no hand in the guilt that occasioned them. Instances of these, and such like dispensations of providence, render the doctrines of the atonement and satisfaction of Jesus, as they are revealed in scripture, very credible to men of an

attentive and humble disposition of mind. We can never, my brethren, think with too much reverence, and judge with too much caution upon subjects of this nature; and nothing can be more absurd than that a creature like man, instead of attending to facts and observations in order to form his opinions, should rely upon the combinations of his own imagination, and adopt these as the dictates of reason and of truth. I have no intention of entering upon a full discussion of these subjects. To the observations now made, and the texts of scripture already produced, I shall only add the following.

The apostles declare in their epistles, *that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us^g, and that we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son^h; Christ is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole worldⁱ*. Can it be expressed more clearly that the great purpose of the death of Christ was to expiate

^g Rom. vi. 8. ^h Rom. vi. 10. ⁱ John ii. 2.

our offences, and to reconcile the Almighty to us his offending creatures? Whenever we attempt to explain things of this kind too particularly, we are in very great danger of running into error, by reckoning the objects, the manner, the ends, and the means of the divine government too much alike to those of human governments, though there certainly is an infinite difference. By assisting the imagination to form distinct conceptions of the counsels and designs of Omnipotence, we are apt to confound the conceptions that are suitable to the Supreme Being, with those which man may be supposed to entertain in similar circumstances. Unguarded expressions have been used, as if the Divinity could be capable of revenge, implacability, weakness; all which are certainly far removed from him, and which it never was the design of those very men, who used the expressions, to ascribe to him. But to all my ideas of goodness, of justice, of mercy, it appears nowise contradictory to say, that in that great and extensive

scheme of divine providence which is carrying on in the world, and of which the wisest of the sons of men sees but a very small part, it became fit and necessary, perhaps unavoidable, that an extraordinary degree of suffering should befall an innocent person, who, by his voluntary submission to it, should rectify a number of those disorders which were introduced into the world, and by conciliating the Supreme Being should thus prevent its final destruction.

As therefore, my brethren, the expiation of sin, and the reconciliation of men to an offended God, were the principal parts of that plan which our Saviour was to execute upon earth; and as the assurance of the completion of it could not fail to afford the highest comfort and joy to his followers; he, agreeably to the general benevolence of his nature, and the attention he ever paid to the great ends of his mission, regardless of the pain and anguish he endured, and solely intent upon what

was great and becoming, just before he resigned his soul, proclaimed aloud, *It is finished.*

Having thus taken notice of the different explications of which these last words of our Saviour are capable, let us consider the peculiar light in which this discovers his character to us.

What has been now said, may serve to give us a view of the death of Christ somewhat different from that in which it is commonly considered, but not less interesting. According to the general constitution of the human frame, and the connection between the soul and the body, it is impossible, by any mere effort of our own, and without some violence, to separate the one from the other. There is also a certain degree of pain and suffering which unavoidably produces this dissolution, and which no inclination nor desire of the individual can prevent. These are established laws, to which in general all the sons of

Adam must bow. But with respect to our Saviour, it does not appear that they took place. He had that power over the connection which subsisted between his soul and his body, that at any period he could have dissolved it, without the intervention of any ordinary means. On the other hand, he could have prevented any of the ordinary means which take away life from being used against him; or when they were used, he could have been above their efficacy. The magnanimity then of our Saviour's life and death appears in this, that as long as the purposes of divine providence required it, he endured the most excruciating and intolerable pains, though it was in his power to quit that veil of humanity which subjected him to them; and that as soon as the moment was come, when the will of heaven was fulfilled, he at once dissolved that connection which, according to the counsels of that will, and on account of a most generous love for a perishing world, he had so long preserved. Thus he speaks always of laying down his

own life; and expressly says, *No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down, and I have power to take it again*^k.

The Jews sent out an armed force against him, and assaulted him as a common malefactor. He could have rescued himself by his own power, or called for legions of angels, who at his command would have immediately delivered him. But *as a lamb is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth*^l. Patiently did he bear every contumely, indignity, and torment, till the whole will of God, and all the designs of his miraculous dispensation were accomplished. Then by a like voluntary act which had occasioned his assumption of the human frame, he greatly resigned it. It has been justly observed, that the words which we translate *he gave up the ghost*, would be more properly and literally translated, *he resigned*, or *he dismissed his spirit*. And it is remarkable, that when the centurion

^k John x. 18.

^l Is. liii. 7.

heard him cry out with a loud voice before this happened, and observed that the force of his natural vigour was not abated, he immediately concluded that there was something miraculous in the manner of his death. For, (saith the evangelist Mark) *when the centurion which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God^m.*

It is impossible to discover the conduct and character of Christ in a more interesting point of view, than that in which this exhibits him to us. In how faint a light does the virtue of patriots and heroes, of all the just, and good, and great appear, when contrasted with the virtue and magnanimity of Jesus! By an election properly his own, he submitted to misery. Though sensible of all its severity, and able to avoid its stroke, yet he never shrunk from the combat, or rejected the bitterest draught that was presented to him. The Jews went

^m Mark xv. 39.

out against him with swords and staves, as against a murderer: the apparatus of his death, and the circumstances which attended his execution, were dispiriting and shocking; such as would have disarmed mere humanity of its fortitude. The extension of his body, the piercing of his hands and feet, the cruel and unrelenting malice of his enemies, doubtless produced a degree of pain that was excruciating. But with what meekness, composure and resignation does he bear it, though we cannot doubt but he might have avoided it! Could not he have quitted that mansion in which his spotless soul was lodged, and would not heaven have immediately opened to receive its pristine, immaculate inhabitant? If he required it, would not the earth have heard the voice of its former Master, and swallowed up his merciless tormentors? The sage of antient Greece would not violate the law of his country, nor desert the prison where he was confined: a striking, but unequal representation of the magnanimity of our Saviour.

He knew that the operation of poison would soon terminate a life that had been devoted to the service of his fellow-citizens; and rather than transgress the laws, under whose influence he had acted such a distinguished part, he submitted to death; and with true intrepidity met his fate. But our Saviour, unrestrained by any law, unsubjected to any necessity, suffered a thousand pangs, and though despised and insulted by a whole nation, deserted by his own disciples, deprived of every thing, to all human appearance, that can disarm death of its terrors, yet still refused to quit the prison in which his celestial spirit was lodged, 'till the whole purposes of heaven were fulfilled. "Yes," says a writer whose faith is not stable, but whose heart is open to the sentiments of greatness, of worth, and of humanity, when he considers merely the external circumstances which attended the death of the Athenian, and of our Saviour, "if the life and death of Socrates
 "are those of a sage, the life and death
 "of Jesus are those of a God."

“No person,” says the antient maxim, “can be called great or happy before his death.” It is this which crowns the most illustrious life, and sets the seal upon the fairest character. Estimate our Saviour’s character by this rule. To depart out of life with protestations of injured innocence, gives no unfavourable impression; but to suffer the life and actions to speak for themselves, and to remain unshaken under a load of infamy and injustice, as conscious of superior dignity, affords sensations far more pleasing and powerful. To forgive one’s accusers, to pardon the most undeserved ill-treatment, is truly great; but to return condescension for malice, to show the most generous piety, and to pour forth the most fervent prayers for one’s bitterest foes, is a pitch of glory that is transcendent. To be solicitous about one’s future state, and to support one’s mind under unjust sufferings with the prospect of after-felicity, is becoming and manly; but to be solely intent at the hour of death, upon the execu-

tion of a plan undertaken to promote the welfare and happiness of others, is truly divine. That the soul upon the immediate prospect of its separation from the body, should hesitate and flutter, and leave its ancient receptacle with some reluctance, is natural to humanity; but to discover the precise moment, when the purposes of heaven are accomplished, to make a voluntary resignation of the soul, to quit the body by a proper exertion of inherent power, are actions becoming a Deity.

S E R M O N XVIII.

I S A I A H liii. 3.

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

YOU all know that these words are a part of a most remarkable and precise prediction of the character of our Saviour, whose death many among you design to commemorate this day, by partaking of that sacrament which he instituted for that very purpose.

I need not tell you that you ought to be inflamed with the highest love and gratitude to your Master, and affected with the deepest sorrow for your sins, on so solemn an occasion. Not to raise in you these dispositions, for I am persuaded you feel them already, but to cherish, to improve, and to exalt them, I shall at this time relate some

of the chief sufferings our Saviour endured, which plainly point him out *as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*. And, O blessed Jesus, I humbly implore thy assistance to enable me to speak on this affecting subject, with that fervour which is becoming thy votary, and that divine energy which may touch the hearts of thy disciples.

Before we introduce the sufferings of our Saviour, let us just take notice of the primeval, and fallen state of the human race,

Man came out of the hands of his powerful and beneficent Creator, an innocent and upright being, feeling no disquiets within, and exposed to no tempests without, enjoying full means of immediately gratifying every desire, and entirely happy in the sensible friendship of the universal Parent of heaven and earth. With the most unbounded scope to satisfy every want, and liberty to range in a paradise of delights, there was imposed but one single prohibition, as the mark of his dependance, and the test of his

obedience. This prohibition, however, man disregarded, and desiring to be equal to God, fell below the true dignity of a man, lost the favour of his Maker, his inward peace and tranquillity, and introduced into the world sin, and diseases, and pain, and death. The race indeed increased; but ignorance, violence, oppression, and every kind of iniquity increased with them; and the calamities which were at first confined to two, extended to millions, and involved the numberless posterity of the apostate pair. To this deplorable condition, consisting in the loss of innocence, the consciousness of guilt, the dread of misery, and the train of tormenting thoughts, which must accompany these, was man sunk.

A human eye might have pitied his fellow-mortals: but no human hand could have helped them. This task was even too arduous for any of those exalted orders of beings which continually surround the throne of God, and sing his praises. But it was reserved for one who was fully able

to execute it: and while angels saw and compaffionated fallen man, in the affembly of heaven the Son of God declares his merciful intention of fubjecting himfelf to their ftate, in order to be the author of their falvation. His Father approves, and to preparing the way for his appearance, the miniftry of angels, and the fchemes of man are made fubfervient.

At length the appointed period for that wonderful event which prophets foretold, and for which martyrs bled, arrives. The eternal Son of God, *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the exprefs image of his perfon*, by whom the heavens and the earth were made, condefcended to appear among mankind. He put off the effulgence of divine glory, and was cloathed with the robe of humanity. Where fhall I look for this divine perfon? Is he born in a palace? or does he make his appearance with the pomp and fplendour which the mifjudging world reckon the companions of greatness? Behold he comes, the Saviour comes: but

it is in a mean and humble condition. He left the joys of heaven, the bosom of his Father, that seat of serene and unmixed happiness, the veneration of angels, and for thee, O man, he enters into the state of wretchedness. A stable is his birth-place, and a manger is his cradle. How extraordinary was this change? From living with cherubs and with seraphs, yea, from being their superior, he becomes an inhabitant of the same mansion, with the beasts of the field. O Jesus, in this humble condition, when tender and innocent upon the knees of thy mother, she beheld thee with divine complacency, who could discern the Son of the Almighty, and the Saviour of the world? None but heaven-directed minds. And they discern him. Lo angels acknowledge thee, and at thy birth proclaim *peace on earth, and good-will to men*^a. Some of the wise and worthy confess thee as *the salvation of the Lord, the glory and the king of Israel*^b.

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^a Luke ii. 14.

^b Verses 30. 32.

But this very confession becomes to Jesus a source of sorrow, and draws upon him the hatred and resentment of a powerful tyrant. To escape the fatal effects of these, it is necessary to convey him into a foreign land, and in those tender years which seldom raise envy, my Redeemer is forced into exile, and exposed to all the hardships that attend it. He is again brought into his own country, lives in subjection to his parents, enduring hard labour, and all the inconveniencies of a mean condition.

But now the scene opens. He prepares to execute the work for which he appeared among men. The world considers him as nothing else than the carpenter's son : but his forerunner, that powerful preacher of righteousness, declares his dignity. Yea, the declaration of heaven itself is given in his favour. That awful voice, which the dead shall hear and obey, the voice of the Almighty, pronounces him his *beloved Son in whom he is well pleased*. Could he have been ushered into the world in a way more

ready to conciliate the love and approbation of mankind, to make the good to revere him, and the wicked to dread him? Thus one would judge. But attend to the history.

The apostate angel, the king of darkness, the patron and head of the wicked, always watchful against the first appearance of any thing that is good, and ever desirous to seduce from righteousness, has power allowed him to tempt him. He uses his most prevailing arts. But neither hunger the most extreme, nor the offer of earthly power and splendour, could draw him from the direct path of integrity. Secure on every side, a suit urged with a religious appearance could not deceive him. At last baffled, as when he fell from heaven, he leaves the Son of God, and angels receive him.

Our Saviour now enters upon his public ministry : and what astonishing facts are we presented with ! Behold and wonder, the most singular predictions of the pro-

phets are fulfilled ! The eyes of the blind are opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame leap like the hart, the dumb sing for joy, and the inhabitant of the silent tomb is restored to life. Surely these wonderful acts of love and kindness procured him such approbation, that he could want neither the necessaries, nor the conveniencies of life. Whose door would not have been open for the reception of so honourable a guest ? Who that had two garments would not have bestowed one upon him ? Or who would not have shared with him the very last morsel ? But the case was far otherwise. I am covered with shame, when I reflect upon the ingratitude and inhumanity of the Jews, and hear my Saviour thus speaking of his own condition, *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head*^c. The rains did not sooner descend, the winds did not sooner blow, and the tempests did not sooner roar, than he, without aid, without shelter, felt all

^c Matth. viii. 20.

their force. Shrinkest thou, O christian, at the relation of those hardships? Let thy tears flow in admiration of that patience and fortitude which never shrunk from the feeling of them.

But I come to tell you of sorrows which pierced thy Redeemer much deeper. Those I am to mention, tho' to him unspeakably great, yet unless thy soul feel something of that benevolence which actuated him, will not perhaps strike thee much. Yet hear and consider them. I mean then the sorrows and grief which Jesus felt in being despised, *rejected*, hated by such numbers of his countrymen. O the distorted eye of malice, what will it not see? Does our Saviour keep company with *sinners*, in order to reform them? Then is he called their *friend*. Does he wear no forbidding or austere appearance, but partake innocently and chearfully of the gifts of providence? Then he is *a glutton and a wine-bibber*^d. Does he perform miraculous

^d Matth. xi. 19.

cures, in order to bestow health, in order to spread happiness and joy; and does his desire to be the author of these prevent him from observing rites that were merely ceremonial, institutions that were merely positive, and never designed to preclude such beneficent works? Then is he a disrespecter of their laws, a contemner of their lawgiver. Yea, do the devils obey his word, and leave those who were possessed by them? He effects this by a combination with their prince; and works of piety, justice, and charity, are the foundation on which the kingdom of Satan is reared^e. Do you say, were undeserved hatred and reproaches, which many men have borne bravely, so difficult to be supported by Jesus, when he had the inward testimony that there was no guile in him, and when unspotted innocence and integrity were his robe, and his diadem? Mistake me not. The pain and sorrow which Jesus felt, did not proceed from the reproaches which were thrown upon him: but from this cause they proceeded, from knowing the dispositions

^e Matth. ix. 34.

which prevailed in those who reproached him. How are we shocked, and what pain do we feel when we see our fellow-creature in the last stage of a loathsome distemper? But could mental diseases, the diseases of malice, of hatred, of envy, of obstinacy be exhibited to our senses, how much greater anguish would a generous mind feel for the miserable sufferer? By looking forward, and considering the end, how would the anguish be increased? Now to the penetrating eye of Jesus, those diseases appeared in their blackest deformity: and the unhappy wretches who were infested with them he beheld ignorant and blind, ready to fall into that miserable state, where is *weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, where their worm dieth not, and their fire shall not be quenched.* Ye benevolent minds, figure to yourselves what the benevolent mind of Jesus endured, when to the inhabitants of Chorazin, Bethsaida, proud Capernaum, and Jerusalem itself, he, foreseeing the final day of retribution, pronounced woes, the very thought of which must

chill the warmest blood, and to avoid which they will but in vain call upon the mountains and hills to cover them for ever. Behold him then despised and rejected of men, and overwhelmed with grief, not on his own account, but on account of the very sinners who despised him. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !*

But the measure of his sorrows is not yet full. And before I could relate all that even man can declare, the shades of night would cover the earth; for from the cradle to the grave, his life was one uninterrupted scene of the deepest affliction. Let us only then, in order to raise the highest emotions of love and gratitude, view him in the last period of it.

Attended by his favourite disciple and Peter and James, he withdraws into the garden. In this solitude, removed from his

enemies, can so innocent a mind suffer distress? But what an astonishing spectacle! He is in an agony. He sweats drops of blood: and his own words, who never uttered a complaint but when the cause was insupportable, are, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*^f. He asks the aid of his friends, and entreats them to watch with him till that hour of extremity should be over: but the wakeful eye of friendship is soon sealed at this time; and alone, unsupported and unpitied, he endures the dreadful anguish. The united force of the powers of darkness, combined with the malice of all mankind, could not have filled him with such anguish. It is an invisible, but an infinitely powerful hand that afflicts him. The cup of his Father's wrath is now presented to him, and that vengeance which would have crushed a guilty world, is now directed against this innocent and holy one. For the iniquities of man, from the eating of that fruit which introduced all our woe, till the consummation of

^f Matth. xxvi. 38.

the world, the punishment was now inflicting upon him. I adore, O adore with me, that infinite love of Jesus, that entire submission to the divine will which makes him say, 'Tho' the potion be bitter, yet for man I can drink it; *not my will, O Father, but thine be done.* Yet, all ye sons of calamity, ye children of affliction, I appeal to you, if ever ye felt, or if there ever was sorrow, like unto that sorrow where-with the Lord in his fierce anger afflicted the Saviour of the world.

This scene is not over when his ungrateful disciple comes to betray him. Thy Master, Judas, thy loving Master, thou betrayest with a kiss. This token of love that traitor makes the signal for seizing upon his Lord. Unhappiest of mortals! In thy hearing the purest, the most sublime and elevated doctrines were taught, the most pathetic exhortations delivered, and the wisdom of divinity itself displayed: but all without effect upon a heart which was harder than the rock. Yet know, that

vengeance pursues iniquity. And deliver us, O just heaven, from ever feeling any degree of that remorse which hastened the exit of this wretched man. The spotless Son of God now a lawless, armed multitude drag away, and pour on him all manner of indignities. How meekly is he led along, though legions of angels would have appeared at his word to rescue him? How tamely does he bear the reproaches which malice invents, and spite utters? Harmless and innocent, like a lamb to the slaughter, is he led, and his mouth is not opened against his most inveterate foes. *The Shepherd is now smitten, and the sheep are scattered*^s. His disciples, whom he had treated as his most familiar friends, who had been the companions of many of his former woes, now desert him. In his sufferings he did not behold the alleviating tear of sympathy shed upon his account. One disciple indeed, more zealous than the rest, who had greatly resolved

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^s Zech. xiii. 7.

rather to die with his Master, than forsake or deny him, mingles among the croud. But how weak is human resolution ! In the very presence of his Lord, thrice he denies him with oaths. Yet struck by his eye, which looks on me, on all, he repents, weeps bitterly ; and He, who never knew what it was to refuse pardon, forgives him.

In the mean time, to all the insults of a tumultuous rabble, to the derision of the very lowest of the people is Jesus exposed. They mock him : they smite him : they strike him on the face. *His visage was more marred than any man, and his form more than the sons of men^h.* How was the priesthood degraded on that day, when Caiaphas joined with the people in such unjust, such barbarous treatment of the Lord of glory ?

He is now hurried before Pilate's tribunal. Pilate sees no fault in him ; but

^h Isaiah lii. 14.

his enemies cry, *Crucify him*. Let never a judge deliver an innocent person to appease a multitude, or to preserve his own power. Let the laws ever be, as they ought to be, the guardians and avengers of the righteous cause; and let their punishment never fall but on the guilty head. How different was the case at this time? That integrity and impartiality, which ought to be dearer to a judge than his life, is laid aside by Pilate. But his conscience smites him: he calls for waterⁱ. Alas Pilate! water could not cleanse from the stain which this heinous crime infixed. The multitude, whose rage had pushed them not only to devote themselves, but as far as they could, their children to destruction, having now the sanction of the high-priest, and the licence of the governor, drag my Saviour, and my King, to execution.

Those hands which had wrought so many miraculous cures, are bound like the hands of a common malefactor. The

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ⁱ Matth. xxvii. 24.

head which deserved to wear a crown of glory, and which now wears it, as a mark of their contempt, they crown with thorns. Happy woman ! thou who pouredst a box of precious ointment on this sacred head, shalt ever be mentioned with honour, and this shall ever be recorded as a memorial of thy name ; while the crucifiers of the Lord of life shall be considered from generation to generation, as objects of the highest abhorrence. They renew their former insults. Having clothed him with the mock ensigns of royalty, they bend the knee before him, saying, *Hail King of the Jews*^k. They spit upon him, and take the reed which they had put in his hand, and smite him on the head. Then *he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheek to them that pulled off the hair ; he did not hide his face from shame and spitting*^l.

At last with relentless hearts they bring him to Calvary. But who is able to re-

^k Matth. xxvii. 29.

^l If. i. 6.

late what passed at Calvary? A cross is erected, a punishment for the most atrocious criminals, and criminals of the lowest rank, remarkable too for the exquisite pain it inflicted, and for its long continuance. Here they fix the innocent Jesus between two men who were to receive the due reward of their deeds. Now his *lovers and his friends stand aloof, his kinsmen stand afar off^m*, and there is none near to help. Is not the hatred of his enemies now satiated? Suspended between heaven and earth, ready to die, and yet patient under the calamity, is he yet an object of derision? When *the golden bowl* is breaking, and *the silver cord* is loosing, is this a season for insult? Cruelty, be thou ever my abhorrence, and with thy sons let my soul never partake! In this very extremity they mock and revile him. O all ye that pass by! here humanity calls for your pity. Here ye may shed the generous tear; and the world will applaud it. But passengers

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^a Pf. xxxviii. 14.

join with his crucifiers and deride him. He is thirsty, and the soldiers present him with vinegar. His side they pierce with a spear: the very parting of soul and body they endeavour to render more insupportable than it generally is. Yet what a benign and merciful look was that, and what an earnest petition to his Father? Surely a prayer for his deliverance. No. O inimitable love! O divine charity! It is a prayer for his crucifiers. And now his soul is so overcast; his prospect of the end of impenitent sinners so striking, his concern for them so great, his love of mankind so infinite, and his Father's wrath so totally overwhelming, that it is impossible to express his condition. Can the Father of goodness withdraw his aid from his own immaculate Son? Can mercy shut its ear against the cry of innocence? To proclaim to the world his abhorrence of man's transgressions, he can; and the words of Jesus are, *My God, my God, why hast thou*

forsaken meⁿ? This total desertion he could not support; and now one dying prayer, and one last groan, and the fountain of life fails, and the Son of God expires. That expiring groan, hear it, O ye heavens! and be astonished, O earth! Lo all nature hears it, and bears testimony to thy dignity. The sun withdraws his light, terrified at what unrelenting man performed. The vail of the temple is rent, the earth quakes, the rocks are rent. His very enemies now declare him innocent. Behold your Saviour now with his head dependent, his eyes closed in darkness, and his body stiff and cold. Could you see your enemy, O christian, endure such affliction as this man of sorrows endured, and not weep for him? But consider that he was your firmest friend, your most bountiful benefactor, ever true to your interests, ever anxious for your salvation, and that in order to promote it even death was welcome to him. *O that my head were waters,*

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ⁿ Matth. xxvii. 46.

and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night! Here admiration, gratitude, love and sympathy prompt our tears. Here the dauntless hero should weep and not be ashamed. This day Jesus looks from heaven, and sees how we are affected. He approves of our sorrow: but kind and beneficent as ever, he would alleviate our grief on his account, and desires us to turn it into a mean of our improvement. He seems to say, Why mourn ye for the living as if he were dead? Behold I am alive, and live for evermore. But as he addressed the daughters of Jerusalem of old, he adds, Weep not for me, christians, but weep for yourselves, for I was wounded for your transgressions, I was bruised for your iniquities.

O my brethren, consider then all your sins as the cause of your Saviour's sufferings. He was the *propitiation for the sins of many*. He gave his life a ransom for sinners. Esteem him not stricken and smitten of God for his own sake, but be-

cause he bore the griefs which we should have felt, and carried the sorrows which we deserved. Consider the sins by which we deserved them, repent of them, and forsake them, that you may have *redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of your sins.*

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S E R M O N XIX.

I C O R I N T H I A N S xi. 26.

For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come.

IT was the intention of the apostle in this chapter to point out to the Corinthians some of those abuses which they had introduced into the worship of God, and to bring them back to a purer and more perfect plan. Their manner of celebrating the Lord's supper had been remarkably indecent. When they met together for this purpose, instead of behaving so that this institution might promote their piety, and confirm their integrity, they had shamefully converted it into a mean of fostering sensuality, riot, and even inhumanity. The apostle openly charges them with their vices, and boldly condemns them on account of them. His zeal how-

ever is the zeal of an honest man, sensible of the faults, but anxious for the reformation of those to whom he wrote.

With a view to their reformation, he gives them a simple, yet full and perspicuous account of the Lord's supper; which, he declares, sprung not from the tradition of men, or from the suggestions of his own reason or imagination, but from the immediate revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ: *For I have received of the Lord, that which also I deliver unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it and said, Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me*^a. After this account of the institution of the Lord's supper, the apostle endeavours to turn the attention of the Co-

^a Ver. 23, 24, 25.

rinthians to its principal end, and thus to insinuate an argument for the decent and orderly observance of it: *For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come.*

This and the similar passages of the new testament clearly point out the intention and object of this institution, and give us a distinct and full view of them. Can any thing be more plain than it is from scripture, that the bread and wine, which are made use of in the Lord's supper, are intended to be memorials of the body of Christ which was broken, and of his blood which was shed upon the cross; and that the eating of this bread, and the drinking of this wine, were enjoined his followers as solemn acts to be performed in remembrance of his death? Almost every christian understands this. And yet, making allowance for the manner of speaking common at that period, and supposing nothing intended contradictory to our reason, and our senses, the words of Christ appear to me to

be as intelligible and perspicuous as the paraphrase now given. But tho' the design of the institution may be easily understood, being delivered with that plainness for which the gospel in general is remarkable; yet certainly it is not for that reason to be regarded with the less reverence, or observed with the less solemnity. All religious and well-disposed christians, nay many of very indifferent characters, have commonly considered it as an institution extremely sacred, the neglect or contempt of which betrayed a very corrupt heart, and a very impious temper.

I propose, in discoursing upon the words now read, to inquire what those causes are, which have engaged men to view it in this light, to regard it with this peculiar reverence. Before I enter upon this inquiry, let me premise an observation or two.

1st, When I speak of the causes which engage men to consider the Lord's supper as an ordinance peculiarly sacred and so-

lemn, I do not intend to insist upon those causes which, though they may have at particular periods, and with particular persons, or even with large bodies of men, greatly contributed to this, yet are not founded in the reason of things, or the nature of the institution. I am very sensible that for many ages of the church, the mystery which the priests affected, and the ignorance in which the people were involved, together with many absurd doctrines respecting this institution, occasioned much of that veneration which was paid to the Lord's supper. With many men, there is nothing which more promotes admiration, than a strong faith, and little knowledge. Curiosity excited, but not gratified, proves the surest foundation on which superstition, enthusiasm and error can be built. I wish that even in our days the veil, which is sometimes industriously, sometimes undesignedly, and sometimes ignorantly thrown over the ordinances of religion, be not often the principal cause of our reverence for them. But the cause of God and virtue

have so many real supports, that they need no false ones. Every fraud is detestable: but a pious fraud (the very appellation is an affront to heaven) is the worst of all frauds. I propose therefore to consider only those causes of reverence for this sacred ordinance which I regard as just and well-founded, and which I believe chiefly to have prevailed in the first and purest ages of the church, and to prevail still with wise and sober christians.

2dly, In mentioning the peculiar reverence with which the institution of the Lord's supper is to be regarded, I do not mean to insinuate a comparison between that degree of reverence which is due to this ordinance of religion, and that which is due to other ordinances of God's appointment. Comparisons of this kind are generally improper; sometimes impious. But there may be some duties of religion, a failure in which does not discover so great corruption of heart, nor is accompanied with so bitter remorse as a failure in others:

and there may be some duties of such a complicated nature, as to touch many of the feelings, and work on many of the affections of the heart at once; so that an irreverent behaviour in the performance of them may shock us more, and indicate a more abandoned character, and a more corrupted heart than the same behaviour in the performance of other duties; tho' in these also it would be highly impious. For instance, in reading the word of God, if we willingly permit the cares, anxieties, and temptations of the world to intrude upon us, we are certainly guilty of a sin: but if we indulge the same wandering and worldly disposition in our immediate addresses to God, we are guilty of a greater sin. Again, every address to God demands the most serious and recollected temper. For a weak creature to stand in the presence of the all-perfect God, to raise his soul to the contemplation of his wonderful nature, and at the same time to think of him as his father and his friend, ought at once to elevate and compose, to soothe, and to expand

the soul: and insensibility, at the very time we seem to be employed in devotion, is surely highly criminal. Yet insensibility or irreverence in the participation of the Lord's supper is more highly criminal. For this participation not only implies prayer, and that too animated by the most affecting considerations, but also recalls to our mind a character and an event, which have the strongest tendency to work upon all the noblest, and the most generous principles of our nature. In this situation, irreverence discovers a soul not only lost to piety, but almost deprived of the common feelings of humanity.

Having premised these observations, I proceed to take notice of the causes which should engage christians to consider the Lord's supper as an ordinance extremely sacred, and to regard it with peculiar reverence.

In the first place: I would observe that it is a positive institution of christianity,

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appointed in very peculiar and affecting circumstances.

The positive institutions of the gospel have frequently been considered merely as means to an end, not essentially necessary, but fit and proper to be observed. Perhaps this sentiment, under proper limitations, may be free from error. But I do not see that the observation is very important. I can conceive a state, in which the performance of the positive duties of christianity would not be binding, because in that state it might be impossible to perform them. I can also conceive a state in which several moral duties may be lawfully omitted, nay must unavoidably be omitted, because there would be no scope for the practice of them. But I can conceive no state in which a christian can with a good conscience omit either a moral, or a positive duty, if he has a proper opportunity for performing it. Men may differ concerning the times and seasons proper for the observance of positive institutions, or they may

differ in their opinion concerning the frequency of their repetition ; but they may differ also concerning the extent and obligation of moral duties. We know that these depend in some measure upon particular characters, circumstances and opportunities.

Thus much appeared necessary for removing a prejudice against the reverence due to a positive institution of religion, which an incautious manner of expression may have sometimes occasioned. Let us now consider the particular circumstances and solemnity with which the institution presently under consideration was appointed.

Our Saviour had gone with his disciples to celebrate the high festival of the Jews. He had given strong intimations of his immediate departure from his friends and followers. He had plainly told them, that he would not again partake in a feast which they probably thought was to continue thro'

all generations. He had particularly informed them that, by the treachery of one of those few whom he had selected from the world, he was to be delivered into the hands of sinners. This threw a general damp upon the company, and each, anxious and sorrowful for himself, said, *Is it I?* His reply confirmed all their fears. It could not remove their concern for the loss of their master, their friend and their benefactor; nor was it so precise, as to remove from any of them all a suspicion that his own fidelity was called in question: *It is one of the twelve that dippeth with me in the dish*^b. It is added, *The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him, but wo to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born*^c. It was at this time, when the disciples could not fail to be in a state of the utmost anxiety, agitation and despondency, that our Saviour *took the bread, and having given thanks, brake it, and gave it to them, and said, This is my body*^d; and

^b Mark xiv. 20.^c ver. 21.^d ver. 22.

afterwards *took the cup, and gave it to them* with these remarkable words, *This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many*^c. I ask any man, if this was not a scene which must leave the deepest impression on the minds of the disciples? Could they have been men, especially considering what followed, if they had ever forgot it? Can any thing, which tended to raise a greater variety of emotions and affections, be described or conceived? Could there ever be a solemn meeting in which the apostles and first christians were together, where the conversation would not turn upon this subject, and where every apostle would not expatiate upon the words, the looks, the manner of his master; upon the anxiety, uncertainty and terror which possessed his own mind, and upon the emotions which his companions discovered?

If this very transaction were painted upon canvas by a skilful hand, and presented to a man of sensibility who had refused

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^c Verse 23, 24.

his belief to the evidence of religion, yet he would for a moment become a christian, as it were by contagion; and sympathy would be the predominant emotion of his heart. But how dead is all description, compared to nature and living objects! if Judas was present, surely his heart relented for a little: had not the very spirit of satan dwelt in him, it had relented for ever.

When we attend to these circumstances, we must be sensible that in the primitive days of christianity, this institution could not but excite the utmost respect and reverence in christians; and that the being engaged in it could not but call up every pious, every affectionate feeling in the highest degree of fervour. I allow that it cannot be expected to operate so strongly upon us: but is it possible for any believer, who is not destitute of sensibility, seriously to read the description which Mark or the other evangelists give us of this scene, and not feel the powers of his soul roused, its

worldly desires rebuked, and its religious affections awakened? The circumstances therefore, and the solemnity of the original institution render the Lord's supper highly worthy of our reverence, and shew the want of this temper in observing it, to be extremely culpable and criminal.

2dly, Another reason which may properly engage men to consider this institution in the most solemn light, and possess them with the highest reverence when they are employed in it, may be discerned by attending to its nature and design.

This reason had probably more influence afterwards, than at the first appointment: for at that time it is likely that the apostles were far from entertaining clear and distinct conceptions on this subject. We know sufficiently, that the Lord's supper was intended for a commemoration of the death of our Saviour, and that this great event is the object which it sensibly represents to us. Now there is something in

the very idea of death which tends to make men serious and thoughtful. The recollection of the last end of mortals, even when we do not view it with a particular respect to ourselves, throws the soul into a solemn stillness, which is friendly to every pious and religious meditation. But it is not merely the view of death in general that this ordinance suggests: it recalls to our thoughts the death of a particular person who stands in a particular relation to us, and who by his death procures inestimable blessings for us; a death which is described with all those circumstances that can lay hold of the mind, and excite either admiration, or gratitude, or sympathy.

To consider this subject in its full extent would be more than sufficient for a whole discourse. Let us therefore view the death of Christ as briefly as we can in these two lights; as the death of a great man, and as a mean of purchasing our reconciliation to God, and our title to eternal life. The first is a general view, into

which even a heathen might enter, and express his admiration on account of it. The second is particularly interesting to christians.

Is it then possible to contemplate the blameless life, and the heroic death of Jesus, and not feel the workings of admiration and love? If I met an ignorant and untaught Indian, and could inform him in his own language that at a certain period there lived a most extraordinary person, who, before he was thirty-three years of age, had done more good, and suffered more evil than any man ever did in the longest life; that his whole employment was to promote happiness, and prevent misery; that no human creature ever applied for his aid in vain; that he had the wonderful power of healing all diseases, of making men wise, gentle, kind, merciful; that in pursuing these ends, he refused neither cold, nor hunger, nor watching, nor poverty, nor reproach; that notwithstanding all his beneficent actions, his cruel and

wicked countrymen, after making him suffer every hardship, led him to a shameful execution ; that being persuaded he could live no longer for the good of mankind, he cheerfully died to give them a proof of his firmness, and constancy, and resignation to the will of the great God ; that he shewed neither fear of death, nor resentment against his murderers ; that on the contrary, he expressed the tenderest solicitude for their happiness, and prayed for them with his dying breath ; and that he expired after having exhibited a perfect pattern of patience, meekness, forbearance, generosity, fortitude, of every thing great and good ; would not nature work in the honest savage, and would not his countenance declare the feelings of sorrow, love and admiration ? Shall a savage then feel, and a christian be hardened ?

But this view of the death of Christ, interesting as it is, is still very imperfect. When, as christians, we reflect that for our sakes *he was a man of sorrows, and ac-*

quainted with grief^f: When we attend to the nature of the blessings which he purchased, the favour of God, the means of sanctifying our natures, our access to glory and immortality; must not all the best and most devout feelings of the soul be raised to the highest pitch of fervour? If we attend to the unspeakable dignity of his character, to his condescension in becoming man, to the amazing fortitude of his death, must not the highest admiration rise? If we view our sins as the causes of his sufferings, what can we feel but humility, compunction and penitence? If we turn our observation to the severity of his pains, the anguish of his soul, and the torments of his body, must not sympathy melt the heart and fill the eye? If we survey all the blessings of his purchase, must not gratitude to so generous a benefactor, and so divine a friend, exert its influence? But these, my brethren, are all subjects immediately connected with the death of Christ, which we commemorate in the sa-

^f Isaiah liii. 3.

crament of his supper. To render our observance of this institution acceptable, it is necessary indeed, that every one of these considerations should actually occur to the mind. But when an ordinance has a tendency to operate upon so many of the most virtuous principles of our nature, does not this shew that it ought to be regarded with the greatest reverence and veneration?

3dly, The solemnity of this ordinance, and the reverence due to it, will further appear, if we consider that the observance of it implies the exertion of many affections, which are all in their own nature of high importance and excellence. If each of these be sacred, surely that which implies them all must be particularly so.

Now though the principal end of this institution be extremely simple, namely a commemoration of the death of Christ, yet it involves several other views. This may be collected from what was said on the last head. If a sense of the primary

intention of this ordinance has a tendency to excite so various feelings as have been pointed out, it is impossible but these must produce their natural and ordinary effects. Let the communicant's view be turned to the sufferings of Christ, and to the consideration of sin as the cause of them; surely this is extremely natural. But can these be the objects of attention to a sincere and honest mind, without introducing a resolution against sin, or a prayer for its forgiveness? Holy resolutions then, and fervent prayer, have both their share in the devout observance of this institution. Yea, the latter, from the practice of all ages, and the example of our Saviour, is essentially necessary before the ordinance can be celebrated.

I know it may be disputed, whether the examination of our conduct, and resolutions against all sin, be absolutely requisite for a proper participation in this sacrament. I doubt not but circumstances might be supposed, in which a good man would

think himself obliged to commemorate the death of his Redeemer, without having time for a previous examination of his conduct, or in which, during the time of his participation, his mind might be so totally occupied with love or gratitude, that he might form no direct resolutions against sin. But this is nothing to those who would be most anxious to have it determined that such exercises are not necessary. But put the case, that at the time of participation, a man's conscience condemns him for his sins, and impells him to resolve against them, which yet the corruption of his heart, and his attachment to vice, engage him to neglect. In this situation, could he approve of his conduct? would not his heart condemn him; and if his heart condemn him, will God justify him? At the tribunal of divine justice, would one choose to trust to the refinements of an acute understanding, or to the simplicity of an upright heart? Thus resolutions against sin may often become an indispensable

part of our duty, during the participation of the Lord's supper.

In like manner, if the inimitable love of Jesus Christ, and the inestimable blessings of his purchase, are the objects of our reflection while we are employed in this duty; does not the gratitude which these excite, naturally engage us to vow perpetual attachment to him, and steadfastness in his service? If the outward meanness, the poverty, and low condition of Jesus Christ, induce us to reflect upon the insignificancy and small importance of the things of this world; and if at the same time conscience bring to our remembrance an instance in which they have had influence enough to make us forsake the road of integrity, and abandon ourselves to sin; does not this lay us under an obligation to enter into a resolution of repentance, and to begin immediately to carry it into execution?

Thus prayer, pious and virtuous resolutions, vows of attachment, obedience and repentance, if not essentially necessary to the participation of the Lord's supper, yet may become indispensable parts of our duty during this action. What therefore implies such serious and solemn duties must be an object of the greatest reverence.

4thly, My brethren, this institution, which is designed to commemorate the death of Christ, is also intended to carry our thoughts forward to his second coming. The New Testament connects it with this event; it is particularly connected with it in the words of my text; *For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come.* If there is any event in nature that can excite the awe, reverence and respect of reasonable and accountable creatures, it is surely the future judgment. But this judgment is only to take place at the second appearance of Jesus. *For*

God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained^g, even the Lord Jesus Christ the righteous. The apparatus, the procedure, the dignity of the Judge, the particular part we shall all have in this grand transaction, render it particularly interesting and important. If the soul of man can be occupied with any object, this must command its regard and attention. To this important event the Lord's supper naturally directs our thoughts. It is a lively representation of that *obedience of Christ unto death, even the death of the cross^h*, on account of which God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every nameⁱ, and which, being the ground of his whole exaltation, is consequently the very reason why God hath given him authority to execute judgment also^k. It confirms our faith of the general judgment, it is a pledge given us, that he *who was once offered to*

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^g Acts xvii. 31.^h Phil. ii. 8.ⁱ Ver. 9.^k John v. 27.

*bear the sins of many, shall unto them that look for him, appear the second time, without sin unto salvation*¹. Can it fix our thoughts on the future judgment, can it enliven our conception of its solemn process, without impressing every serious and considerate mind with the deepest awe?

I shall but make two reflections on what has been said. 1st, Since the Lord's supper is an institution of so great solemnity, we should by no means neglect to observe it. Shall any christian treat that with neglect, which deserves the greatest reverence from every christian? Not to observe it, is to treat it with total neglect. 'Twas in the night in which he was betrayed to death for you, and it was with all the agonies of his death full in his view that your Saviour said, *Do this in remembrance of me*: can you hear his voice uttered in that night, uttered in that endearing situation, and yet disregard it? Every tender, every affecting, every interesting circum-

¹ Heb. ix. 28.

stance of the scene, which that night exhibited, is a strong argument for our *continuing* in that *breaking of bread*^m, which was purposely appointed for the commemoration of it. The dignity of him who died, and the end of his death, which was to expiate sin, add solemnity to this memorial of his death; and they no less powerfully plead for every christian's joining in this memorial of it. This is the tribute which you are called to pay to the greatest person that ever trod this earth; it is the acknowledgment demanded from you, to him who made his soul an offering for your sins. All those good affections which this institution is fit for drawing forth into exercise, it is fit also for improving: to neglect it shews indifference about the improvement of our best affections. It is only Christ's coming again to judgment, that can extinguish the obligation of christians *to shew forth his death*; till he come let us take every opportunity of doing this in remembrance of him.

R 2

^m Acts ii. 46.

2dly, Since the Lord's supper is so solemn, so fit to command the sincerest reverence of our souls, we should be always careful to prepare ourselves for partaking in it with serious and fervent devotion. Irreverence in any act of worship is a heinous sin: but irreverence in observing this christian institution, is in some respects peculiarly atrocious: it is a mark of very great depravity: it shows insensibility to the most moving objects, and obduracy which the most alarming views cannot overcome. This institution may make some impresson on the most unthinking, it may force reflection for a moment on the most dissipated, it may excite some emotions of piety, in those who are for ordinary the greatest strangers to them. The Corinthians observed it in an irreverent manner; and the apostle reproves this irreverence with great severity, and warns them that it was of the most dangerous consequence; *Whoſoever ſhall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, ſhall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord: He that eateth*

*and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body*ⁿ. The religious affections all prevailing in their greatest vigour, and mingling their warmest exertions, form the temper which becomes this commemoration. By examining ourselves, by humble confession of our sins, by earnest prayer, by meditation on whatever can most effectually melt our hearts into contrition, or touch them with love, and gratitude, and joy in God's salvation, let us prepare ourselves, as often as we have opportunity, for the religious performance of this duty.

ⁿ 1 Cor. xi. 27. 29.

S E R M O N XX.

A C T S xx. 35.

And to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

THE most interesting concern of human creatures is happiness; and no rule so unexceptionable can be fixed for estimating the value of any object, or the propriety and importance of any disposition, or action, or course of behaviour, as its tendency to promote happiness. But the rule, however universally acknowledged, is often very ill applied, and indeed with respect to many pursuits and dispositions is scarce ever thought of. Nature has provided us with a touchstone, but we neglect to try the most precious metals by it, and by the neglect suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the basest counterfeits.

The happiness which is derived from the exercise of a beneficent temper, is very rarely an object of consideration, especially in an age, when the spirit of commerce, the love of lucre, and a contracted regard to the individual, give the strongest bias to all our opinions and judgments. They who inherit overgrown fortunes, they who have received liberal donations, they who have acquired wealth, are reckoned among the happy, though they employ them only in fulfilling the purposes of folly, vanity and vice. A splendid table, a fine house, a handsome equipage, even gaudy apparel, we are more apt to consider as characteristic of the happy man, than generous efforts to relieve the wretched, to support the unfortunate, to comfort the disconsolate, to patronize the deserving. These we still regard as marks of virtue, but we seldom consider them as symptoms of happiness. Even the motives which excite the generality to actions of a publick and beneficent nature, when they are not merely sordid and selfish, are so dependent upon the views suggested

by our reasoning powers, that they have little connection with the heart; and the man who should urge the pleasure of a kind and beneficent action, and the sweet enjoyment which it brings along with it, as the motive to a person's performing it, would be deemed ignorant of what is reckoned the most essential branch of human knowledge, the knowledge of the world. But in reality, under this boasted knowledge, the blindest prejudice, and the grossest ignorance often lurk: and the world, not only in its purest and most virtuous, but even in its corrupted and depraved state, affords arguments sufficient to confute the men who value themselves for knowing it best.

It was hinted already, that the most infallible test of the value of any disposition or behaviour, is its being conducive to the natural and real felicity of men: and to this test I might safely submit all the laws, and all the maxims of the gospel. If the temperate, the manly, the con-

ſcientious, not the effeminate, the weak, and the timid, were to be the judges, I ſhould not fear the deciſion even with reſpect to its ſevereſt laws, the endurance of perſecution, loſs of goods, reſignation of life.

But our preſent inquiry is more confined. It was the ſaying of the Lord Jeſus, *It is more bleſſed to give than to receive.* In this ſaying, the felicity of a beneficent temper is aſſerted in the ſtrongeſt manner. The encomium ſeems to be given to the action; but it is obvious that human actions are praiſe-worthy, only ſo far as they reſult from right diſpoſitions, and that it is only the agent that deſerves commendation or blame, reward or puniſhment,

The circumſtances of our Saviour's life gave him frequent occaſions for introducing this ſentiment with propriety; and as it is addreſſed to the tender and generous feelings of human nature, it muſt have

made the deepest impression on his followers. The application which the apostle Paul makes of this saying in my text, discovers the effect which it produced on him, and shews that he regarded it as a practical truth of the greatest moment. In this last discourse to the elders of Ephesus, whom he had assembled at Miletus, he was able to make this noble appeal to them ; *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak ; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.* Though in these words there is a comparison between the happiness of bestowing, and that of receiving, yet it will be putting no violence on them to consider them simply as a declaration of the blessedness of a beneficent temper. That with which this temper is contrasted, and to which it is preferred, being an ac-

known mark of good fortune, and a source of enjoyment, the other must be still more so.

I propose therefore in this discourse, to confirm and illustrate the happiness of a beneficent disposition; and to suggest a few of those reflections which naturally arise from the consideration of this subject,

By a beneficent disposition, I mean a disposition to do good to others from the principles of kindness, affection, or humanity, which includes not only acts of charity, generosity and liberality, for these must in a great measure be dependent upon our external circumstances, but also all the means we use, the pains we take, or the wishes we entertain for the comfort, enjoyment and happiness of our fellow-creatures. That such a disposition must be of the utmost consequence to our own satisfaction and happiness, I think will appear evident from several considerations.

In the first place, This will appear by considering in general what it is that must constitute human felicity.

To write a treatise concerning human nature requires perhaps as much knowledge, attention and reflection, as the composition of a performance on any other subject whatever; but such a treatise is not necessary, either for directing our conduct, or for determining the operation of our feelings. We are all men, and we all feel that the gratification of our natural desires, where the gratification is not forbidden by any other principle of our mind, is always a source of enjoyment to us. But the nature, and the kinds of our enjoyments are as different and various as the powers and principles which give rise to them. Except a few of them, however, which regard self-preservation, they are almost all connected with our social natures, infomuch that the enjoyments of a human creature entirely separated from his kind, tho' possessed of all the necessaries for satisfying his

hunger and thirst, his love of labour and desire of repose, would be totally different from those of the man who is placed among his fellows. As the sun nourishes, invigorates, animates objects external to himself, and was certainly created with a reference to them; as the planets by their mutual attraction promote and preserve the regularity of their several motions, so man was created for man; and his state, his wants, his desires, point out his connection with, and his dependence upon his fellow-men. Philosophers have sometimes talked of man's being a selfish, and a solitary being, having all his views centered in the happiness of the individual, without the least regard to others: but the hut of the Indian, the cottage of the peasant, the pipe of the shepherd, the tent of the wanderer, as well as the concourse of the city, the palace of the prince, the government of the state, contradict the assertion.

Religion which, notwithstanding the imperfection of its effects, has occupied a great deal of the joint care and attention of the human race, in every age, and every nation, as far as ever I have read or heard, shews that a social concern for others is the object of man's heart, and the principle of his conduct. Without this, I should just as readily believe, that political statesmen and cunning priests have built in antient times cities without hands, made men of mere clay, and supported mountains upon their feeble shoulders, as that they could have introduced religion as the general occupation and employment of mankind.

Since then the whole of the human frame points to a state of society and connection with others, the very nature of desire renders it impossible that the gratification of those affections which respect others should not be attended with enjoyment and happiness. But the benevolent affections of our nature, our desire to shed the tear of sympathy over the distressed, to take part

in the injuries of the oppressed, and to befriend them, to partake the innocent pleasures of the happy, are the affections which most immediately respect others; and therefore we may conclude that the indulgence of them will be a source of particular pleasure and delight.

It further deserves to be remarked, that though the gratification of desires which respect the individual, and the gratification of those which respect others, have this in common, that they are attended with a certain pleasure, yet they differ in a very material article: the pleasure which attends such desires as terminate in the individual, even when most intense, is confined to the moment of indulgence; to none but the groveling and the sensual, is it the object of agreeable reflection: but the social pleasures of our nature are not agreeable only in the mean time, but extend to distant periods, and are the objects of after-consideration, and the sources of permanent enjoyment. The flashes of heaven's light-

ning dazzle and overpower, but the resplendent and benign rays of the sun cheer, enliven, and afford a light constant, and invariable, and universal.

I add but one more general observation. Human creatures are made for action and exertion. Whenever these are employed, a separate and additional pleasure attends the gratification of all our desires. To do good, to bestow, to give, requires an exercise of our active powers. In that state when every impulse is felt, when every power of the mind is awake, we enter with the highest relish into every pleasure that nature warrants, and religion sanctifies. The mind that groaned under the load of suffering, is calm and serene when that load is removed, but the soul that removed it is elevated. The composed countenance of relieved distress, the affectionate look of gratitude combine with the pleasing efforts of liberality and kindness to increase the joy and felicity of the benefactor.

In the second place, the happiness of a beneficent disposition may be proved from fact and experience.

We are ignorant of our true happiness, only because we pay so little attention to what passes in our own minds, and suffer ourselves to be imposed on by external appearances, from which we draw inferences often not in the least connected with them. But an impartial consideration of the sentiments and feelings of our hearts, of those suggestions which proceed from the constitution of our souls, or the immediate motions of that divine Spirit which pervades the universe, would free us from numberless mistakes, and lead us to expect our enjoyments from such objects as can really bestow them. Now can any man, when he attends to himself, doubt wherein his pleasure and enjoyment chiefly consist? Deep researches and intricate disquisitions are not necessary for determining it. An ordinary degree of attention only is requisite, and fortitude enough to take the answer

implicitly from none, but to trust to the natural feelings of one's own heart. Can any person who has the soul of a man hesitate to pronounce that among the purest and best pleasures of which he is susceptible are those which arise from the opportunities he has laid hold of, to be useful to his fellow-creatures, to supply their wants, to ease the load of their sufferings, to add to the number of their enjoyments? When the rich have spared of their superfluities to minister to the necessities of the poor, let the luxurious tell if what they reserved had not a higher relish. When the poor, out of real pity to those who were still poorer, have bestowed a small pittance to feed the hungry, or to clothe the naked, was it not natural for them rather to regret that they had not more to give, than that there was too little left behind? Did the widow, think you, who threw in two mites into the treasury with the best intention, depart with a heavy heart, because she had kept nothing to herself? If ever your presence, your attention, your conversation, your look of silent sensi-

bility, your falling tears (for these I count more sacred gifts than your gold, or your silver) have administered consolation to a widowed mother, or disconsolate children, did not your hearts in that moment feel the blessedness of giving? and when you came away, would you have exchanged the melancholy pleasure for all the vain illusions of folly and vice? When the gratulations of the blind and the lame, and the benedictions of the perishing soul came upon Job, would he have compared the joy with what arose from the possession of his oxen, his asses, his camels, and his fields? It was the character of the Lord Jesus, that he went about continually doing good, soothing the penitent, comforting those that mourned, raising up the bowed down, and healing the diseased; and as he felt like a man, we may conjecture the inward joy which this continued course of beneficence gave him. I verily believe it to be the chief natural mean that rendered him so intrepid, so patient, so forgiving, so resigned, How similar to him should we

become, if we yielded to the best impulses of our hearts! If the Ephesians had divided their possessions to enrich the apostle Paul; how small must his pleasure in receiving it all have been in comparison with what he felt from reflecting, that he had been the minister of God for good unto them, without prospect, or possession of human reward?

Were the apostles in general, who watched with such vigilance, and laboured with such vigour to promote the salvation of mankind, strangers to the most heart-felt pleasure, because they were not loaded with gifts, secured in possessions, or surrounded with affluence? No. They had imbibed the maxim of their Master, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*; and while they suffered hunger, and poverty, and persecution, and death, they rejoiced, and were happy, because they were doing good. Abraham might reject even royal gifts, and refuse a sepulchre for his family without paying an adequate value for it: his

conduct neither proves that the patriarch was ignorant of the means of happiness, nor lessens him in our esteem. But no man ever yet omitted an opportunity of performing a kind, a generous, or a beneficent action, who did not in that instance abandon the happiness of his own soul, and render himself less worthy of the approbation of all mankind.

It is needless to multiply instances. I appeal to yourselves. Happiness is within the mind. It is not of our own making, but flows from constitutions that are established by the same power that ordains the revolution of the sun, the course of the rivers, the ascent of the vapours. To suppose happiness entirely or chiefly placed in externals, is as ridiculous as to suppose that you are as much connected with the dust on which you tread, as with that portion of it which the Almighty operation has formed for your body. There is no disputing the point. If beneficence renders the soul calm, tranquil, and elevated, it is a source

of felicity. If it assimilates the mind to God, and to Jesus Christ, it must render us partakers of their bliss. If the reflection upon it is agreeable, if it remains when *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life* put on an appearance at best diminutive, often disgustful; if it casts an unfading ray on the latest hours of human life, and prepares for a participation of the life of angels, the reality, and the value of the enjoyment must be acknowledged.

In the third place; The felicity of a beneficent disposition may be evinced from this consideration, that by this quality we are most directly assimilated to God, and to Jesus Christ, after whose image we were at first created.

As it is the nature of two drops of water, when placed near each other, mutually to be attracted, and to coalesce; as it is the nature of heavy bodies to fall to the ground, and of light ones to be buoyed up; as it is the nature of worms to crawl upon

the earth, of fishes to swim in the sea, and of birds to fly through the air ; so it is the nature of the human soul to aspire after a similitude to its divine original. The consequences of a fallen state, and of corrupted principles, are but too perceptible, and to these we justly impute those mistakes, deceptions, disappointments, and disgusts with which we meet in our search after felicity. The piety, and the fall of David, the wisdom, and the weakness of Solomon, the zeal, and the infirmity of Peter, with a thousand instances that could be produced from sacred and profane writers, of the virtue and the ambition of the same princes, the allegiance and the turbulence of the same people, might all be brought in proof of the fall of man, if any other proof were requisite, than merely to read the history of this catastrophe, and to look into our own hearts. But the instances would shew, that though man be fallen, he is not annihilated ; that though his lustre be sullied, it is not extinguished. He still raises his mind at times to the contemplation of uncreated

excellence, and the instincts of his heart indicate his relation to the divinity. In every approach that he makes to his primeval purity, he feels the gratulations of his own soul, and enjoys the triumphs of his conscience. But in no way can he become so like his Maker, as when his heart is intent upon doing good. The beneficent hand of the Almighty formed, and his power sustains the universe. *He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust*^a. *He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*^b. The divine person who was *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*^c, imitated him in his bounty and beneficence, and gave us an example that we should follow his steps. If then the felicity of man consists in his resemblance to his Maker, if the joy of the redeemed should bear a similitude to the delights of the Redeemer, if to participate in the bliss of the Supreme be the supreme happiness of us the emanations of his

^a Mat. v. 45. ^b Psal. cxlv. 9. ^c Heb. i. 3.

goodness; surely, *it is more blessed to give than to receive*, and happy are all who have rightly learned the divine lesson.

The subject I have been considering would naturally give occasion for a variety of reflections concerning the regulation of our conduct. Let us select a few.

The general effect of what has been said ought to be, to inspire us with the love of a kind, humane, beneficent disposition, and to lead us to cultivate it in our hearts. It is the heart that is the source of good, or the source of evil. The streams will ever partake of the qualities of the fountain. If the love of goodness be not rooted in the heart, in vain will formal rules, or general, or particular precepts ever attempt to make a virtuous man. When the love of justice dwells in the heart, two neighbours of the most extensive property will easily agree together. But where this principle is wanting, all the statutes that were ever devised, all the

complicated laws that were ever made, will only set the ingenuity of the mind at work to elude them. The design of the gospel is therefore to change the heart, to renew the mind where it is depraved: and the life of its Author, the manner, and the matter of his doctrine, and all his institutions are directed to these purposes. The language of the whole is, *My son, give me thy heart*^d.

If this general effect be in any measure produced upon them who profess themselves the disciples of Jesus, what has been said may suggest particular instruction to those of every rank. How should it enlarge the sentiments, and dilate the benevolence of the opulent, making them consider riches as the gifts of heaven for the good of mankind, and the happiness of their own souls? With what wisdom is the advice given, to *make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitati-*

^d Prov. xxiii. 26.

ons^e? In every corner, upon every spot, the objects of misfortune present themselves to our view, if we will not shut our eyes from seeing them. I grant there is a selection and a caution necessary in dispensing our charity, or liberality. The avowed solicitors of it are neither perhaps the most meritorious, nor the most indigent. But blessed heaven! how generous is it, how delightful to prevent those whose hearts refuse to ask it, and to wipe away the tear that flows from secret sorrow, to befriend those that have known better days, and entertained happier prospects, to ease the anguish of a mother's heart, who suffers more for her orphans than for herself. What means of luxurious enjoyment does money thus employed afford! And know that, judiciously applied, even a small revenue may confer much power of doing good. Bestowed with sympathy, given without ostentation, attended with the sincere look of honest kindness, a small thing to many is a great matter.

^e Luke xvi. 9.

But farther, though the blessings of this world should not fall to our share, how much is in the power of every man to bestow upon the wretched? The hard-hearted alone are ignorant, how far attention, compassion, seasonable advice, kind words can go to alleviate many of our sorrows, and our sufferings. The tear that mingles with mine as it falls, its value cannot be reckoned in gold, or silver. The affection I perceive in my friend when my heart is overwhelmed, if I could compare it with the idol of the interested, let my heart never perceive it again.

Finally, Let what has been said cherish in us a spirit superior to the little sordid views of being dependent upon others for the necessaries of life. The apostle wrought with his hands that he might be burdensome to none, and that he might have something to bestow. *It is more blessed to give than to receive.* All the duties of benevolence, of compassion and of kindness, to an honest heart must be granted,

not solicited. The man that throws himself upon the charity of the world without absolute necessity, by that very action renders himself less worthy of it, and renders the best men less disposed to give it. The charity of a christian is an offering of his heart. The call to it is not the importunate cry of the mendicant, but the observation of human suffering and distress. As we are men, let us yield to this call where we discern it, and let us never try to raise the emotions of pity, or engage the hand of charity, when Providence calls us rather to give than to receive.

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